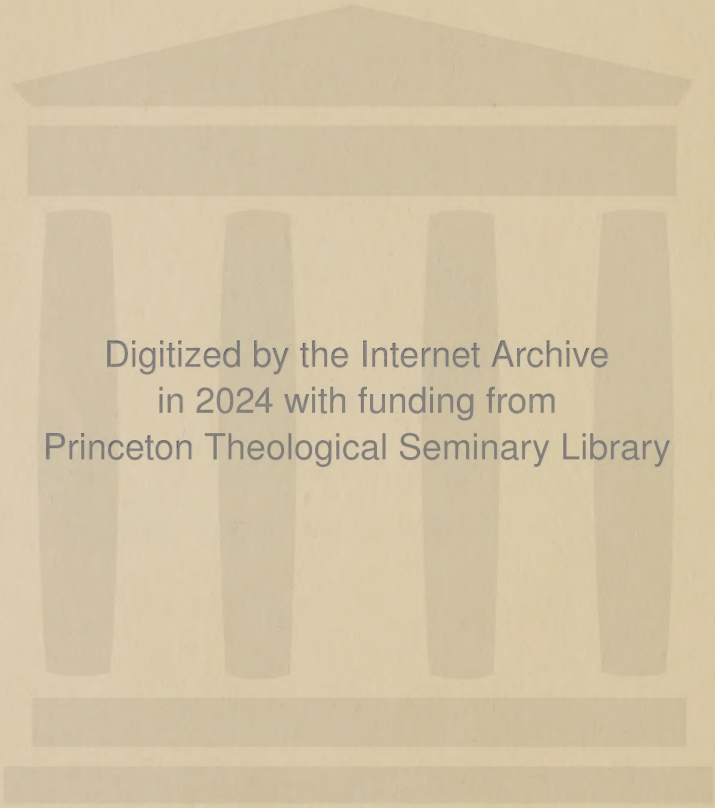


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A FATHER FABER HERITAGE

"There are some thoughts which, however old, are always new, either because they are so broad that we never learn them thoroughly, or because they are so intensely practical, that their interest is always fresh. Such thoughts are, for the most part, very common thoughts. They are so large and so tall that they are obvious to all capacities, like the huge mountains which are visible from the plain."

FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER

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A Father Faber Heritage

selections from the writings of Reverend Frederick William Faber of the London Oratory

Edited with an Introduction by
SISTER MARY MERCEDES, S.N.D. de Namur



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to the memory of

SISTER EVELYN MARIE

Provincial Superior of the Baltimore Province of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

this book is affectionately dedicated for her kind encouragement in the production of the work

Introduction

Facts and dates are essential to a biography, but it is the knowledge of his works that gains for an author world-wide popularity, if he deserves it. When impressions rise to admiration and further acquaintance reveals an undercurrent of purpose harmonizing with a vast wealth of thought from a richly endowed mind, an attraction founded on human appeal is only natural. The works of Frederick William Faber, however varied in their subjects, all have a unity of thought and feeling pervading them. His many productions reveal a truly spiritual quality in his zeal for the glory of God, an ardent interest in souls, a reverence for the human experience, and a marked effort to make timeless truths interesting to his readers. Faber's persistent themes were the love of God for man, God in the midst of our earth, and an insistence that our world is God's world.

Father Faber was both theologian and poet, as his numerous hymns and other poems prove; besides, much of his prose has been said to be poetic. At the time of his acceptance of pastoral duties in the Anglican Church, William Wordsworth said to him: "I do not say that you are wrong, but England loses a poet." It is true that Father Faber's style has sometimes met with impatient criticism because of his repetitions, but he himself says: "I have dared to press the keys of spiritual music," and we may dare to say that a beautiful chord might be struck more than once without detriment to the theme. His works continue to be read and appreciated by thousands decades after his death. It has been said that no writer of his time found his

works translated into so many European languages within so short a period. Faber's influence not only moulded the hearts of several generations of English-speaking Catholics, but his influence extended far beyond the borders of his native land.

From his earliest years, Father Faber gave promise of remarkable literary gifts. His talents were carefully fostered by his parents, both of whom were persons of considerable ability, and development was assisted by the beautiful surroundings in which his childhood was passed. The memory of these early scenes dominated much of his poetry on nature and human nature, and in later years exercised a strong influence on his love for children. Many of his beautiful hymns were written for the orphans of his locality, and his correspondence gives evidence of his power to attract little children to himself. The following letter he wrote to the orphans of Saint Anne's Home is characteristic:

My dear little great-grandchildren:

Today is the feast of my saint, Saint Wilfrid, and I have a great many things to do, and a great many cares on my mind, and I am sometimes inclined to be out of spirits. One of my ways of getting cheerful again is to think of you, my dear little children, and of the way you are trying to love Jesus and to be good and to have your hearts like Saint Philip's heart. I have gray hair and you are quite young and little. How much more time you will have to work for God than I have. . . . I love to think of the after-years when you will affectionately remember Saint Anne's Home and all that the dear Mother of the convent and also Sister A. did for you. You will see what a blessing it all was. You will laugh and cry together for joy when you think of those funny little refectory tables, and that snug dormitory, and that grand cupboard full of bonnets and umbrellas which I always visit and admire so much. I hear nothing but good of you, my dear children; only you must not be proud. It is Jesus who makes you good. I love you very much and pray always for you. You are a joy and a treasure to me, my dear children.

Yours affectionately in Jesus and Mary,

F. W. Faber
of the Oratory

Father Faber always spoke of localities visited, occupations engaged in, joys, sorrows, friendships, illnesses, as inspirational occasions; but his most real hours seem to have been those when he came to have a new idea of God. It is interesting to read in one of his pages a passage that offers a very close analogy to his own life:

> He who looks over the wide Atlantic sees a waste of waters with a white horizon on every side; but that waste of waters tells nothing of the multitudinous, manifold life which it contains within its bosom. . . . What we see is amazing; yet it hardly indicates what is below.

Beneath the surface of Faber's laborious life of preaching, writing and guiding souls, there runs a current of humor that seldom appears overtly in his poems or prose, but is evident in his letters which are less widely known. Letters of friendship, because they are spontaneous, are often considered a more accurate indication of character than studied productions.

When the volume *All for Jesus* was published, it was received with great enthusiasm. Only one note of criticism was sounded in the chorus of praise won by the book. Father Faber had introduced the Pharisee into the cloister! "Self-praise," he wrote, "is apt to be the besetting sin of nuns, and they should sometimes remind themselves that a publican in the world needs less pity than a Pharisee in the cloister." In reply to a religious superior who took objection to these remarks, Father Faber answered with friendly geniality:

Dear Reverend Mother,

Your letter has just reached me. Poor me! All you good nuns seem to be anathematizing me and, like an obstinate heretic, I am wicked enough to take it as proof that I am right, I grant that I am not fit to write a spiritual book, but, having perpetrated the egregious conceit of doing so, does not all this follow logically: that it is the business of a spiritual writer to point out the faults that beset each

state of life and vocation; that nuns must either maintain that nuns *can* have no faults, or bear with my pointing them out. . . . I had no convent at all in my eye when I wrote those remarks *which a bishop begged me to put in.* Nay, I have never had anything but edification in every convent where I have been and we owe a great debt to all of them.

You say *you* are not touchy about it, but don't you think that those who are feel that the cap fits? Now, is not that an ill-natured speech? After all, is a spiritual book written to praise people or to correct them?

However, there shall be a council of all your Reverend Superioresses in England, and, as I so hugely value convents, I shall do any penance you unitedly impose, to make my peace. "Blessed are the peace-makers"! See, Reverend Mother, what a chance you have of gaining a blessing you can never find in your own convent, viz., of appeasing a quarrel. Reconcile the angry nuns to me and that will be peace-making indeed.

Ever, my dear Reverend Mother, with great respect,

Your faithful and obliged servant in Christ,

F. W. Faber,

Cong. Orat. Presb.

Reparation must have been adequate and the reconciliation complete, even to supplying a remedy for the fault, since it does not seem to be so prevalent now—though the statement is made with some trepidation, lest the cap may still fit! There need be no hesitation, however, in suggesting that the one great chance bestowed on the Reverend Mother never again came into her life.

Father Faber was well equipped by disposition and character to offer assistance in all the difficulties of the Christian life. As superior of the London Oratory, he was remarkable for his cheerfulness and gentleness, for his order and neatness, in spite of the pressures of responsibilities and anxieties. When a confrere remarked upon the order of his room, he replied, "The napkin in the sepulchre was found folded at the Resurrection." His room was at all hours the frequent resort of his brethren who looked upon it as a renewal of Saint Philip's "School of Christian Mirth."

Many of his finest works were written in the midst of severe physical sufferings. Father Faber once wrote:

> I have two vocations, one for my body and one for my soul; as they happen to be incompatible, the body must do the best it can and the soul must rough-ride it for another sixty years, which is supposed to be the term of incessant headaches left to me.

Withal he remained steadfast to the last in his devotion to the welfare of souls. A passage from his eulogy reads: "We know of no man who has done more to make the men of his day love God and aspire to a higher path of the interior life."

* * *

The title for this volume suggests the motive for its publication. Father Faber has left us a *spiritual legacy,* and with it comes the responsibility of transmitting it to others, just as he, in his own day, endeavored to enrich his contemporaries by sharing with them the gifts that God had bestowed on him. In the language of our own time, how does the balance sheet look if a spiritual legacy becomes a treasure hidden in the field of our own enjoyment, or entrenched in the stacks of our libraries? Encouragement to undertake a book of selections was found in the fact that many of our best and more recent spiritual writers are again quoting Father Faber with reverent appreciation for his authority, and for the aptness of his thought to their own treatises. Three of Faber's volumes have been reissued within the past few years, and a fourth, *Growth in Holiness,* is being reprinted by the Newman Press, who also published the new edition of *All for Jesus.*

Selections can, at best, be only representative, and limitations of space made it impossible to include passages from all of the published works of Frederick William Faber. However, it is hoped that a sufficient number are included here to convey something of the flavor and quality of his writing. The passages

were selected with a definite plan and purpose in mind; the unifying theme is a familiar one in Faber's work: *the necessity of living intimately with Jesus.* It is hoped that this anthology will sufficiently arouse the reader's interest to explore the complete works, most of which are still available in the larger, well-stocked libraries.

Sister Mary Mercedes, S.N.D. de Namur

Academy of Notre Dame
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Contents

Introduction vii

1. The Redeemer and the Redeemed 3

Sin-Salvation
A Grand Lover of Jesus
The Ransom for Sin
A Magnificent Price for Sin
A Huge Fortune Swiftly Made and Marvelously Secured
The Easiness of Salvation
Looking at the World Redeemed
The Crucifixion
A Concordat

2. Intercession 43

Our Duty of Intercession
God's Honor
Unbelieving Materialism
A Seared Conscience
True Devotion Means Reparation
The Spirit of the Gospel
A Secret Apostle of Jesus

3. Our Mediators 83

The Blessed Trinity
Love of Mary
The Angels

Praise and Gratitude
The Compassion of Mary
The Sixth Dolor
Mary's Tranquility
Saint Joseph
Mary Our Model in Grief
Veiled but Distinct and Clear
Our Lady's Deathbed Presence

4. Nature and Grace **111**

Whatever God Does Teaches Us Lessons
Responsibility Is the Definition of Life
Living with Jesus
Disquietudes Are Worth the Pain
The Magnificence of God
A Despotic World-Presence
The One Grand Thing: Our Service of God
Kindness
Kind Thoughts
Kind Words
Kind Actions
The Seed-Time of Life
How to Overcome Temptations
Temptations are the Raw Material of Glory
Generosity
The Desire of Perfection
A Want of Spiritual Discernment
The Right View of Our Faults
What Is It to Pray Always?
Under Every Sorrow There is Joy

5. Struggles and Victories **191**

Facts and Principles
Weariness in Well-Doing

Simplicity
Importance of Little Things in Religion
Worldliness
Two Views of the World
Our Forgetfulness that We Are Creatures
Habitual Sins of Omission
The World Whose Friendship Is Enmity With God
The Spirit of a Disobedient Creation
Worldliness Hides Its Real Malice
Disclosures of a Hidden God
Frequent Confession
The Omnipresent Life of God
A Region Which Most Men Cross
Sensitiveness in the Spiritual Life
Our Inclination to Wounded Feelings
Sensitiveness Builds More Than It Will Bear
Sensitiveness Can Be a Grand Gift
The Grand Privilege of Sensitiveness
A Taste for Reading and the Spiritual Life

6. Eternity **283**

A Daily Admonition
A Sense of Security
Purgatory
Devotion to the Holy Souls
And a Deed is Done
The Theological Virtues
Thoughts to be Remembered
Justice and Mercy
Eternal Destiny: We Make Our Own Choice
Eternal Punishment
Our Eternal Reward
An Everlasting Te Deum
God's Ovation to the Saved

The Way to Divine Love
Life in Heaven Is a Life of Love

7. Devotions **319**

Individual Attractions
Confidence in God
Our Heavenly Father
The Holy Ghost
Grace in Mary's Soul
Saint Joseph and the Eternal Father
The Seventh Dolor
The Empire of the Precious Blood
The Church
Saint Joseph and the Catholic Priesthood
The Seven Channels of the Precious Blood
Our Guardian Angel
The Sacred Infancy and the Holy Eucharist
Our Lady's Feasts
All Men Have a Special Vocation

A FATHER FABER HERITAGE

I.

The Redeemer and the Redeemed

Sin - Salvation

Of all miseries the bondage of sin is the most miserable. It is worse than sorrow, worse than pain. It is such a ruin that no other ruin is like unto it. It troubles all the peace of life. It turns sunshine into darkness. It embitters all pleasant fountains, and poisons the very blessings of God which should have been for our healing. It doubles the burdens of life which are heavy enough already. It makes death a terror and a torture, and the eternity beyond the grave an infinite and intolerable blackness. We have felt the weightiness of sin and know that there is nothing like it. Life has brought many sorrows to us and many fears. Our hearts have ached a thousand times. But never have we felt anything like the dead weight of a mortal sin. What then must a life of such sins be? What must be a death in sin? What the irrevocable eternity of unretracted sin?

From all this horror, whither shall we look for deliverance? Not to ourselves, for we know the practical infinity of our weak-

ness, and the incorrigible vitality of our corruption. Not to any earthly power, for it has no jurisdiction here. Not to philosophy, literature, or science; for in this case they are unhelpful matters. Not to any saint, however holy, nor to any angel however mighty; for the least sin is a bigger mountain than they have faculties to move. Not to the crowned queen of God's creation, the glorious and sinless Mary; for even her holiness cannot satisfy for sin, nor the whiteness of her purity take out its deadly stain. Neither may we look for deliverance direct from the patience and compassion of God Himself; for in the abysses of His wisdom it has been decreed that without shedding of blood there shall be no remission of sin. It is from the precious blood of Jesus alone that our salvation comes. Out of the immensity of its merits, out of the inexhaustible treasures of its satisfactions, because of the resistless power of its beauty over the justice and the wrath of God, because of that dear combination of its priceless worth and its benignant prodigality, we miserable sinners are raised out of the depths of our wretchedness and restored to the peace and the favor of our Heavenly Father.

Is hope sweet where despair had almost begun to reign? Is it a joy to be emancipated from a shameful slavery, or set free from a noxious dungeon? Is it gladness to be raised as if by miracle from a bed of feebleness and suffering to sudden health and instantaneous vigor? Then what a gladness must salvation be! For, as there is no earthly misery like sin, so there is no deliverance like that with which Jesus will make us free. Words will not tell it. Thought only can think it, and it must be thought out of an enlightened mind and a burning heart, dwelt on for a long time. The first moment after death is a moment which must infallibly come to every one of us. Earth lies behind, silently wheeling its obedient way through black-tinted space. The measureless spaces of eternity lie outstretched before us. The words of our sentence have scarcely floated away into silence. It is a sentence of salvation. The great risk has been run, and we are saved. God's power is holding our soul lest it should die of

gladness. It cannot take in the whole of eternity. The least accidental joy is a world of beatitude in itself. The blaze of the vision is overwhelming. Then the truth that eternity is eternal—this is so hard to master. Yet, all this is only what we mean when we pronounce the word salvation. How hideous is the first moment after death if we have not been saved! It turns us cold to think of it. But, oh, joy of joys! we have seen the face of Jesus; and the light in His eyes, and the smile upon His face, and the words upon His lips, were salvation.

But there are some who do not feel that sin is such a horror or captivity. They say it lays no weight upon their hearts. They say their lives are full of sunshine, and that time flows with them as the merry rivulet runs in summer with a soothing brawl over its colored stones and its waters glancing in the sun. They say it is so with them, and truly they should know best. Yet I hardly believe them. If they are happy, it is only in fits and starts; and then not with a complete happiness. There is ever an upbraiding voice within. An habitual sinner always has the look of a disappointed man. There is weariness in the very light of his eyes, vexation in the very sound of his voice. Why is he so cross with others if he is so happy with himself? Then, are there not also dreadful times, private times, when no one but God sees him, when he is chilled through and through with fear, when he is weary of life because he is so miserable, when the past weighs upon him like a nightmare and the future terrifies him like the coming of a wild beast? When death springs upon him, how will he die? When judgment comes, what will he answer? Yet, even if the sinner could go through life with the gay indifference he pretends, he is not to be envied. It is only a sleep, a madness, or a lethargy—one or other of these according to his natural disposition. For there must be an awakening at last; and when and where will it be? They that walk in their sleep are sometimes wakened if they put their foot into cold water. What if the sinner's awakening should be from the first touch of the fire that burns beyond the grave?

But we claim no share in any foolish happiness of sin. We belong to Jesus. Sin is our great enemy, as well as our great evil. We desire to break with it altogether. We are ashamed of our past subjection to it. We are uneasy under our present imperfect separation from it. Our uppermost thought—no! our only thought —is our salvation. We care for no science but the science of redeeming grace. The cross of Christ is our single wisdom. Once we wished for many things and aimed at many things. But we are changed now. Our lives are amazingly simplified by the fear of sin and by the love of God. Our anxiety now is that all this may remain. We fear another change, especially a change back again. We can think calmly of no change except from little love to much love and from much love to more love. The right of Jesus to our best love, to all our love is becoming plainer and plainer to us. His exceeding loveliness is growing more and more attractive, because it is revealing itself to us every day like a new revelation. What depths there are in Jesus, and how wonderfully He lights them up with the splendors of His eternal love! He longs for our love, sweet covetous lover of souls as He is. He longs for our love and we long for nothing so much as to love Him. Surely there must be a time and place when both He and we will be satisfied; but the place will be heaven and the time nothing else than the great timeless eternity.

* * *

Salvation! What music there is in that word—music that never tires but is always new, that always rouses and yet always rests us! It holds in itself all that our hearts would say. It is sweet vigor to us in the morning, and in the evening is contented peace. It is a song that is always singing itself deep down in the delighted soul. Angelic ears are ravished by it up in heaven; and our Eternal Father Himself listens to it with adorable complacency. It is sweet even to Him out of whose mind is the music of a thousand worlds. To be saved! What is it to be saved? Who can tell? Eye hath not seen nor ear heard. It is a rescue,

and from such a shipwreck! It is a rest, and in such an unimaginable home. It is to lie down forever in the bosom of God in an endless rapture of insatiable contentment.

—*The Precious Blood*

A Grand Lover of Jesus

We must take a saint to guide us on our way. Let it be the grand lover of Jesus, the Apostle Saint Paul. His conversion was one of the chief glories of the Precious Blood. Redeeming grace was his favorite theme. He was forever magnifying and praising the blood of Jesus. His heart was filled with it, and was enlarged by grace that it might hold yet more. After the heart of Jesus, never was there a human heart like that of Saint Paul in which all other human hearts might beat as if it were their own, unless it be that other universal heart, the heart of King David, which has poured itself out for all mankind, in those varying strains of every changeful feeling, by means of its sweet psalms. Saint Paul's heart feels for everyone, makes everyone's case its own, sorrows and rejoices with those who sorrow or rejoice, and becomes all things to all men that it may save them all. Among the wonders of creation there are few to compare with that glorious apostolic heart. The vastness of its sympathies, the breadth of its charity, the unwearied hopefulness of its zeal, the delicacy of its considerateness, the irresistible attraction of its imperious love—all this was the work of the Precious Blood; and that heart is still alive, even upon earth, still beating in his marvelous Epistles as part of the unquenchable life of the Church. It is impossible to help connecting these characteristics of Saint Paul's heart with the manifest devotion to the Precious Blood. Let us take him, then, as our guide amidst the unsearchable riches of Christ and the superabounding graces of His redeeming Blood. As it was with the disciples as they walked to Emmaus with Jesus, so will it be with us as we go along with His servant Saint Paul. Our hearts will burn within us by the

way; and we ourselves shall grow hot from the heat of that magnificent heart of Him who guides us.

—*The Precious Blood*

The Ransom for Sin

To be eternal is to be without beginning; and to be without beginning is to be independent of any cause or power. This is a true description of God. Creation had a time at which it began, and it was the independent act of God's most holy, most condescending will. Thus there was an eternity before creation, a vast, unimaginable, adorable life, not broken up into centuries and ages, not lapsing but always still, not passing but always stationary, a life which had no past and no future because its whole self was always present to itself. This was the life of God before any creation, an unspeakably glorious life, which we can think of with love and adoration, but which is quite impossible for us to understand. . . .

There is a sense in which creation was eternal. It was eternally in the mind of God. It was one of His eternal ideas, always before Him, so that He never existed without this idea of creation in His all-wise mind and in His all-powerful intention. Moreover, it was always a part of His intention that the Creator should become as it were a part of His own creation, and that an Uncreated Person should really and truly assume a created nature and be born of a created mother. This is what we call the mystery of the Incarnation. It is this which makes creation so magnificent. It is not merely a beautiful thing which God made as an artificer, and which He set outside of Himself, and kept at a distance from Himself to look at, to admire, to pity and to love. He always intended to be part of it Himself in a very wonderful way. So that there would have been Jesus and Mary, even if there had never been any sin; only Jesus would not have been crucified, and Mary would not have had any dolors. But the sight of sin was also with God from the beginning, that is,

through all His unbeginning eternity; and thus the Precious Blood also, as the ransom for sin, was with Him from the beginning. It was one of His eternal thoughts. If we may dare to say so, it was an idea which made Him more glorious, a thought which rendered Him more blessed. That same dear Blood, the thought of which makes us so happy now, has been part of God's happiness forever. . . .

God made the earth, shaped it, adorned it, and filled it with trees and animals; and then looked upon His work, and it shone forth so beautifully with the light of His own perfections that He blessed it, and glorying in it, declared that it was very good. We know what intense pleasure men take in looking at beautiful scenery. When we feel this pleasure, we ought to feel that we are looking at a little revelation of God, a very true one, although a very little one, and we ought to think of God's complacency when He beheld the scenery of the primeval earth and rejoiced in what He saw. There was no sin then. To God's eye earth was all the more beautiful because it was innocent and the dwelling-place of innocence. Then sin came. Why God let it come we do not know. We shall probably know in heaven. We are certain, however, that in some way or other it was more glorious for Him and better for us that evil should be permitted. Whatever God does must of course be most right. My understanding it would not make it more right; neither could I do anything to mend matters, if I understood it ever so well. Everyone should keep in his own place: it is the creature's place to believe, adore, and love.

Sin came. With sin came many fearful consequences. This beautiful earth was completely wrecked. It went on through space in the sunshine as before; but in God's sight, and in the destiny of its inhabitants, it was all changed. Had it not been for Jesus, the case of earth would have been hopeless, now that sin had come. But it was not so. Earth was dimmed, but it was not darkened; disfigured, but not blackened. God saw it through the Precious Blood as through a haze and there it lay with a

dusky glory over it, like a red sunset up to the day of Christ. No sooner had man sinned than the Precious Blood began to be felt. There was no adorable abruptness on the part of God, as with the angels. His very upbraiding of Adam was full of paternal gentleness. With His punishment He mingled promises. He spoke of Mary, Eve's descendant, and illumined the penance of our first parents by the prophecy of Jesus. As the poor offending earth lay then before the sight of God, so does it lie now; only that the haze is more resplendent, since the Sacrifice on Calvary was offered. . . . God does not see us as we see ourselves, but in a brighter, softer light. We are fairer in His sight than in our own, notwithstanding His exceeding sanctity, because He sees us in the blood of His dear Son. This is a consolation, the balm of which is not easily exhausted. We learn a lesson from it also. Our view of creation should be like God's view. We should see it with all its countless souls, through the illuminated mist of the Precious Blood. This is the shape then, that our Father's love takes to us His creatures. . . .

Do we not feel every day more and more strongly that we must be more for Jesus than we are, that of all growing things divine love is the most growing, that all idea of a limit to our love of Jesus or a moderation of our service to Him is a folly as well as a disloyalty? He was the brightness of innumerable lives and the sweetness of innumerable sorrows, when He was but the expectation of longing Israel. What must He be now, when He has come, when He has lived and shed His Blood, and died, and risen, and ascended, and then come back again in all the unutterable endearments of the Blessed Sacrament? . . .

We need not go to Jerusalem, we need not to have lived eighteen hundred years ago to find the Precious Blood and worship it. Here is part of that awfulness of our holy faith which makes us so thrill with love that it is sometimes as if we could not bear the fire that is burning in our hearts. We actually worship it every day in the chalice at Mass. When the chalice is uplifted over the altar, the Blood of Jesus is there, whole and

entire, glorified and full of the pulses of His human life. The Blood that once lay in the cave at Olivet, that curdled in the thongs and knots of the scourges, that matted His hair and soaked His garments, that stained the crown of thorns and bedewed the Cross, the Blood that He drank Himself in His own Communion on the Thursday night, . . . —that same Blood is living in the chalice, united to the Person of the Eternal Word, to be worshipped with the uttermost prostration of our bodies and our souls. When the beams of the morning sun come in at the windows of the church, and fall for a moment into the uncovered chalice, the priest sees it and the light seems to vibrate into his own heart, quickening his faith and love; it is the Blood of God that is there, the very living Blood whose first fountains were in the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

When the Blessed Sacrament is laid upon your tongue—that moment and that act which the great angels of God look down upon with such surpassing awe,—the Blood of Jesus is throbbing there in all its abounding life of glory. It sheathes in the sacramental mystery that exceeding radiance which is lighting all heaven at that moment with a magnificence of splendor which exceeds the glowing of a million suns. You do not feel the strong pulses of His immortal life. If you did, you could hardly live yourself. But in that adorable Host is the whole of the Precious Blood, the Blood of Gethsemane, Jerusalem, and Calvary; the Blood of the Passion, the Resurrection, and of the Ascension, the Blood shed and reassumed. As Mary bore that Precious Blood within herself of old, so do you bear it now. It is in His heart and in His veins, within the temple of His Body, as it was when He lay those nine months in her ever-blessed womb. We believe all this; nay, we so believe it that we know it rather than believe it; and yet our love is so faint and so fitful.

The whole of the Precious Blood is in the chalice and in the Host. It is not part, it is the whole. We may well tremble to think what sanctuaries we are when the Blessed Sacrament is within us. . . .

There is something almost indiscriminate in the generosity of the Precious Blood. It appears not to regard the probabilities of its being used, or appreciated, or welcomed. It goes in floods through the seven mighty channels of the sacraments. It lies like a superincumbent ocean of sanctifying grace over the Church. . . .

Truly, the sacraments are an invention of love, yet are they not also as truly a necessity for our salvation? Would not the divine assurance of our salvation be a very heaven begun on earth? Yet the Sacraments are the nearest approach to such an assurance as the love of our Heavenly Father saw to be expedient for the multitude of His children. . . .

Let us see now the means by which the Precious Blood spreads its empire. These means are the sacraments. It is difficult to describe the sacraments. If an angel were to bear us from this globe which we inhabit and carry us to some distant star, which God may have adorned as a dwelling-place for some other species of reasonable creatures, we should be struck with the novelty and peculiarity of the scenery around us. Some of its features might remind us of the scenery of earth, although with characteristic differences, while other features would be entirely new. This is very much the effect produced upon us when we come to learn the Catholic doctrine about the sacraments. It introduces us into a new world. It amounts to a revelation. The sacraments are a part of the new world introduced into creation by the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, and therefore are an essential part of creation as it was eternally preordained by God. Yet they are quite distinct from any other province in creation. The sacraments of the Old Law were but shadows of the sacraments of the Gospel. The sacraments of the New Law are created things which have been devised by our Blessed Lord Himself. The Eucharist was foreshadowed by the Paschal Lamb; the sacrament of Orders by the consecration of priests and Penance by the legal purification of the tabernacle.

There was no shadow of Confirmation because it is the sacrament of the fullness of grace, and so can belong only to the Gospel dispensation. Neither was there any shadow of Extreme Unction because it is the immediate preparation for the entrance of the soul into glory and there was no entrance into glory for any human soul till Jesus had risen and ascended. Neither could Matrimony be a sacrament under the Old Law, because the Word had not yet wedded our human nature; and the sacramentality of Marriage consists in its being the figure of those transcendent nuptials of the Sacred Humanity.

What then shall we call these sacraments? They are not persons, yet they scarcely seem to be things. I mean that they seem to be more than things. We want another word for them, another name, and we cannot find one. They are powers, lives, shrines, marvels, centers of heavenly power, supernatural magnificences, engraftings of heaven upon earth, fountains of grace, mysterious efficacies, marriages of matter and spirit, beautiful complications of God and man. Each sacrament is a species by itself. Each has some specialty, which is at once its excellence and its mystery. The pre-eminence of Baptism consists in its remission of original sin and the pains due to it. The pre-eminence of Confirmation resides in the vastness of the succors of actual grace which it brings with it, as we see in the fortitude it conferred on the Apostles and which the Eucharist had not conferred. The sacrament of Penance can claim the privilege of the most necessary of all sacraments to those who have been baptized, and of the capability of reiterated remission of mortal sin, which Baptism cannot claim. Extreme Unction excels Penance in the great copiousness of its graces. The excellence of Orders consists in its placing men in the singularly sublime state of being domestic ministers of Christ. Matrimony has a glory of its own in its significance of the union of our Lord with His Church. The pre-eminence of the Eucharist resides, as Saint Thomas says, in the very substance of the sacrament, seeing that it is as it were the

sacrament of all the other sacraments, the center of them, the cause of them, the end of them, and the harmony of them. All are because of it and are subordinate to its amazing supremacy.

These sacraments were designed by our Lord Himself and were instituted by Him with varying degrees of details as to matter and form in various sacraments; and yet, saving their substances, He has given His Church very extensive power over them, because they are so intimately connected with its unity. We see the exercise of this power in the bread of the Eucharist, in the impediments of marriage, and in the varieties of Orders in the Latin and Greek Churches. The sacraments are institutions that illustrate at once the magnificence of God's dominion over His creation, and also the capability of creatures to be elevated by Him to astonishing sublimities far beyond the merit and due of nature; and this elevability of creatures is one of the most glorious manifestations of the liberty of God.

The sacraments are not mere signs of grace, but causes of it. They cause grace in us physically by the omnipotence of God which exists in them as if it were their own proper virtue and energy. The sacraments cause grace physically, just as our Lord's Blood, shed long ago, cleanses us from our sins physically, not morally only, and just as His Resurrection and Ascension cause our resurrection and ascension physically, by an energy and a force which God has appropriated to them. The sacraments also cause grace in us morally, by representing to the Father the merits of Christ's Passion actually accomplished and so doing a sort of holy and irresistible violence to God, and thereby procuring for us more abundant, and at the same time, very special succors of grace. . . .

But the sacraments not only confer a sanctifying grace and infuse habits of virtue, both physically and morally, they also confer a certain special sacramental grace which is peculiar and distinct in each sacrament. Moreover, it belongs to the grace of the sacraments that certain of them impress what is called a *character* or seal on the soul. The nature of this character is

involved in mystery; but the most probable interpretation of it is that which describes it as a natural similitude of the soul of Jesus, likening our souls to His, and imparting hiddenly to our souls a resemblance of His, hidden in this life, but to be divulged with exceeding glory hereafter. This is a beautiful thought and fills us full of a peculiar love for the dear human soul of Jesus. Our clearest idea of the Sacraments is that which we gain from Hugh St. Victor and the elder theologians: they are the making visible of invisible grace. . . . The sacraments are the actions of Christ. He instituted them as Man and thus *they are the going-on of the thirty-three years upon earth.* . . .

The sacraments are the most striking memorials of the love of Jesus and a knowledge of them is most necessary to the right understanding of redemption. . . . They are the inventions of God. No creature could have devised them. I do not believe that without revelation the most magnificent intelligence of angels could have imagined such a thing as a sacrament. It is a peculiar idea of God. It represents a combination of His most wonderful perfections. It conveys to us a distinctive notion of God. We already know God as the unbeginning God. We know Him as the God of nature and the God of grace. These are two different disclosures of Him to us. So the knowledge of Him as the God who devised the sacraments is another disclosure of Him. Moreover, God not only invented them but He invented them for the most magnificent of purposes. He invented them that by their means especially He might impart His Divine Nature to created natures, that He might justify sinners, that He might sanctify souls, that He might unite to Himself the race whose nature He had condescended to single out and assume to Himself. If they are His own invention, they must be works of unspeakable excellence; but if they were meant also for purposes so dear to Him, and of such an exalted character, who shall be able rightly to imagine the excellence of the sacraments? . . .

Strictly speaking, we do not call the sacraments miraculous.

They have laws of their own. So perhaps have miracles. But the laws of the sacraments are revealed to us. Their action follows rules, and is, under fitting circumstances, invariable. Their order and their immutability are two of their most striking features; and this distinguishes them from miracles. They are processes; and in this they are also unlike what we popularly term miracles. But so far as they are wonder-working, so far as their results call forth astonishment, so far as their effects are beyond the power of nature, so far as their completeness and their instantaneousness are concerned, so far as the revolutions they accomplish and the transmutations they make are beyond the strength of common grace, so far as their success is in their secret divinity—so far we may call their operation miraculous. It is certainly in the highest degree mysterious. . . .

The jurisdiction required for the administration of so many of the sacraments, and especially for valid absolution, is a participation in those regal powers which belong to the kingdom of Christ, to the Church in its character of a monarchy. The power of the Church itself to limit the validity of a sacrament, as in the case of reserved sins in Confession, and of impediments in Matrimony, is another feature in the sacraments which enhances their mysterious character, while it exalts the lordship of the sacred humanity of Jesus which has been so copiously imparted to the Church. . . .

The grace of the sacraments is another subject for pious wonder. The special grace of each sacrament, peculiar to itself and accomplishing a peculiar end, is a marvel in itself. Just as the sun brings out the blossoms and paints their variegated leaves in parti-colored patterns, though the whole leaf is supplied with the same sap through the same veins, so does the Sun of Justice work in the special graces of the sacraments. The special grace of each sacrament seems to be almost a visible approach of God to the individual soul, to accomplish some particular end, or confirm some definite vocation, or to interfere in some distinct crisis. It is not His usual way of working. It is not merely a

general augmentation of sanctifying grace, an infusion of livelier faith, of keener hope, or of more burning charity. It is something more intimate between God and the soul, more personal, more full of reference to the individual case. Again, we must not omit to reflect on the inexhaustibleness of the grace of the sacraments. It takes an immense heroism like martyrdom to come near to the grace of a sacrament. Even martyrdom does not supersede Baptism or Confession if they can be had. No one can tell how much grace lies in a single sacrament. In a single Communion lies all grace; for in it is the Author and Fountain of all grace; and if the theological opinion be true that there is no grace in any of His members which has not actually been first in our Lord Himself, then all the grace of all the world lies in one Communion, to be unsealed and enjoyed by the degree of fervor which we bring. The saints have said that one Communion is enough to make a saint. Who can tell if any created soul has ever yet drained any single sacrament of the whole amount of grace which was contained in it simply by virtue of its being a sacrament? I should be inclined to think from manifold analogies both of nature and of grace, that no sacrament has ever been duly emptied of its grace, not even in the Communions of our Blessed Lady.

No sacrament is content to confine itself to the conferring of its special grace. There is always an exuberance about it, giving more than is asked, doing more than is promised, reaching further than was expected. This is a characteristic of all God's works. His magnificence is confined in every one of them and is forever bursting its bounds, carrying light and beauty and fertility, and blessing far beyond the shrine in which it had been localized. But the perfection of God, which above all others, the Sacraments appear to represent, is His magnificence. They belong to this attribute in a very special and peculiar way. Hence there is about them a prodigality of power and a lavishness of benediction which go beyond the ordinary laws of the world of grace. Moreover, besides this exuberance, there is an agility

about the sacraments which is most worthy of note. Sometimes, if need be, one will do the work of another. Those which have no office to communicate first grace and justify the sinner, will do so under certain circumstances. Communion will forgive. Extreme Unction will absolve; not ordinarily, but when there is a necessity for it, and the fitting dispositions. We cannot think without surprise of this power of transforming themselves and of supplying for each other within certain limits which the sacraments possess. . . .

The character which some of the sacraments confer also belongs to their grace. Amid the ardors of heaven and in the dazzling splendors of the Beatific Vision, the inexplicable characters of the sacraments, three in number, as if adumbrating the Three Divine Persons, shine forth as distinct beauties and brighten through all eternity. The character of Baptism is, as it were, the finger-mark of the Eternal Father on the soul. The character of Orders glistens like the unfailing unction of the priesthood of the Eternal Son. The character of Confirmation is the deep mark which the fires of the Holy Ghost burned in, the pressure of His tremendous fortitude which was laid upon us, and yet we perished not, so tenderly and so gently did He touch us. In the wild fury of the tempestuous fires of hell the same characters glow terribly. They are indestructible even there, fiery shames, intolerable disgraces, distinct fountains of special agony forever and forever. . . .

To these reflections on the grace of the sacraments we must not fail to add a due consideration of the doctrine of intention. What things can be more purely divine than the sacraments? Yet, see how sensitive they are to human touch! They do not need our active cooperation so much as our permission. They require obstacles to be removed, but not assistance to be conferred. They work, as we say in theology, by the force of their own work, not by the energy of the recipient. This is their peculiarity. It is this which distinguishes them from other means of grace. In spite of all this they are so sensitive to the touch

of our fervor that they unlock fresh graces according as we press them, as if, in their love and their likeness to God, they were delighted to be solicited and to be importuned. They are also so delicate and so susceptible that they are at the mercy of our intentions. To be so fragile while they are so exceedingly strong, is not this a surprise and a perplexity? It seems to show that they are purely things of heaven, exotics upon earth, or weapons of omnipotence becoming brittle when they are plunged suddenly among human actions. Baptism can justify the child whose reason has not dawned. Extreme Unction can deal with the relics of sin in a sinner who lies insensible. Such independent power have these masterful sacraments. Yet they are in bondage to our intentions. They must be human acts if they are to be divine ones also. Nothing, I think, demonstrates the divinity of the sacraments more evidently than this exquisite sensitiveness to human touch. . . .

Now, look out upon the great laboring world, the world of human actions and endurances; it is not possible to measure the influence which is being exercised upon the world at this moment by the sacraments. They are penetrating the great mass of mankind like the network of veins and arteries in a living body. They are being the causes of millions of actions, and they are hindering the consequences of millions of other actions. They are weaving good and unweaving evil incessantly. The influence of a single reception of a sacrament may be handed down for generations; and the making of destinies of thousands may be in its hands. At this instant, by far the greatest amount of the earth's intercourse with heaven is carried on directly, or indirectly through the sacraments. There is a vast wild world of sorrow upon earth. But over great regions of it the sacraments are distilling dews of heavenly peace. In the underground scenery of hidden hearts they are at work turning wells of bitterness into springs of freshness and life. They are drying the widow's tears, raising up unexpected benefactors for the orphan, nerving the pusillanimous, softening the desperate, rousing the torpid, crown-

ing those who strive, and doing all things for those who die. As the animals came trooping to Adam to be named, so mortal sorrows are coming in herds at all hours to the sacraments to receive the blessing of the second Adam. Somewhere or other at this moment a Communion may be giving a vocation to some youthful apostle who, in after-years shall carry the Gospel to populous tribes in the Asian lands or throughout the river-system of Africa. Crowds in heaven shall owe their endless bliss to that one Communion. . . .

But the world of human joys is not much less vast than the world of human sorrows; and the sacraments are there also purifying, elevating, sanctifying, supernaturalizing multitudes of these blameless delights. Yet there is a difference between their actions upon sorrows and upon joys. They make no sorrows. They cause no mourning. They create no darkness. Whereas they are forever creating gladness. They are fountains of happiness to all the earth. They cover even the monotonous sands of life with verdure, make the desert bloom, crown the hard rocks with flowers, and beautify with their softness the sternest solitudes. Who can tell what songs of human goodness are being sung this hour in the ear of God because of the joyous inspirations of the sacraments? Of a truth human joy is a beautiful thing, a very worship of the Creator. Out of Himself there is no beauty like it unless it be the jubilee of the angels. But the joys which the sacraments have sanctified, and still more, the joys which the sacraments have gendered, who can tell how sweet they are to the complacency of our heavenly Father? . . .

Would that men would study more the science of the sacraments! Devotion would be greatly increased thereby. The peculiar hatred with which the author of heresy pursues what may be called the sacramental principle in our holy faith is a token to us of the stress which we ourselves ought to lay upon it. Hardly anywhere is theology more deep than in the matter of the sacraments. They give us more intimate glimpses of God than almost

anything else, and especially of the ways of God by which we seem to know Him, to recognize Him, and to realize Him. We should know much less of the capabilities of human actions, their limit and their reach, the point at which grace is grafted on them, and their comportment under the pressure of divine things, if it were not for our knowledge of the sacraments. That human actions can be the matter of a sacrament is surely a truth full of philosophical import as well as of theological significance. The union of freedom with sustaining and impelling grace—where is it so marvelously illustrated as in a sacrament? . . .

Moreover, a devotion to the sacraments is very needful for the times in which we live. The spirit of the age must necessarily affect both our theology and our asceticism. Under its constraints we shall be tempted to sacrifice the supernatural to the natural, the passive to the active, and the infused to the acquired. Theology will be allured to merge into metaphysics. Devotion will be considered a vocation, priests a caste, and theology a private professional training. Men will sneer at perfection in the world. Education will be bidden to throw off what it will be taught to consider the last relics of monastic trammels. Men will chafe at the condemnation of books, and indeed at all acts of *intellectual* authority on the part of the Church. A discontent with the existing Church, or at least a want of cordial forward sympathy with it, will grow up. The sovereignty of the Church, the Pope's temporal power, and the hallowed truths enshrined in canon law will provoke impatience as obstinate things which will not die although their hour of death has come. The mystical side of the Gospel will become more distasteful while it grows less intelligible. Heroism will have to rank lower than the ordinary attainments of conscientious piety. The privileges of the Church will be less esteemed and heresy less hated. The influence of the Incarnation will be far less recognized and acknowledged in the world. Such is the spirit which will try to waylay souls on their road to Calvary or Thabor. Such, by the blessing of God, will

not be ours, if we foster in ourselves a deep, a tender, and an intelligent devotion to the sacraments.

—*The Precious Blood*

A Magnificent Price for Sin

The Precious Blood conquered creation back for the Creator, and reconquered the lordship of creation for the sacred humanity of Jesus. It is a magnificent price for sin, because it is infinite; and sin is only infinite by a figure of speech or an invention of mind. We did not therefore require an infinite redemption, though on the side of God's sanctity there may have been a propriety looking to us like a necessity for an infinite expiation. Furthermore, one drop of the Precious Blood would suffice to redeem all possible worlds; so we did not require more than of our share of that drop. We did not require of absolute necessity that it should be so often shed; or that it should be shed under such a variety of pathetic circumstances, every one of which is a beautiful allurement of love; or that it should be all shed, shed even by a miracle of jealous prodigality after death. In all this the magnificence of God goes beyond our necessities, and envelops us in its own immensity. But those other wonders of His magnificence, that we should have unrestricted, repeated, incessant access to the Precious Blood, that it should be to us more copious, more prompt, more at hand, more abundant than the water of our wells and streams, that at every turn of life it should be conveyed to our souls by glorious aqueducts of divine invention, namely, the sacraments, that it should be as common and as convenient to the life of our souls as the air is to the life of our bodies—all these wonders are simply necessities to a wretchedness and feebleness so utter and prostrate as ours. The sinfulness of sin causes us to require nothing short of this. Thus, there are two prodigalities of the Precious Blood, both belonging to the adorable magnificence of God; but one of which is a simple necessity to us, while the other is the liberality of His mag-

nificence, befitting His love, in keeping with His perfections, but not of necessity to us. . . .

Of course, it would have been a wonderful disclosure of God's magnificence if He had justified us once for all in Baptism through the Precious Blood. It would have been worthy to have sustained the wonder of the angels through eternity. What then are we to say to the bewildering varieties, facilities, repetitions, and exuberances of the Precious Blood? Plainly, no language that we can use can really exaggerate the magnificence of God's goodness in this respect. But we may come to think . . . that the very meaning of His magnificence is excess, is His doing more than we require. Thus we become less careful about corresponding to grace and about fidelity to inspirations. We imagine ourselves in a great wasteful sea of grace, which we may move about in as a fish moves about in the waters of the ocean, drinking when it will, but not requiring for its whole life more than a few sips of the unfathomable depths. Whereas, the truth is that not a single grace comes to earth which does not come addressed to some individual soul, and is not noted by God, and has not to be given account of at the last. There is not one least grace, not one most transient inspiration, which is not part of God's accurate and orderly providence over each one of us for the salvation of our souls. Consequently there is not one which can safely be neglected. We have no more grace than we require. Saint Teresa tells us that, even where the grace of perfection is given, it is often necessary for mere salvation. As a theological speculation, we could be saved with less; but in practice we should be lost if we had less.

Thus, while the masters of the spiritual life warn us, on the one hand, not to attempt to go beyond our grace, they teach us still more emphatically that we must be faithful to the grace we have. We read that one Communion is enough to make a saint. So it is in itself; and it is important that we should know this, as it brings home to us the value of Communion. Yet, in fact, hundreds of Communions in our case may be practically

necessary, not to make us saints, but just to save our souls. The grand practical mischief to men's souls is the neglect of the sacraments. The grand practical mistake of pious people is the neglect of fidelity to grace. I believe that unintentionally spiritual writers are somewhat to blame for both these unfortunate delusions. They cannot magnify too much the magnificence of God. They cannot magnify too much the redeeming grace of our Blessed Lord. But they may magnify both one and the other without making proper distinctions. What I have wanted to dwell upon, and experience has shown me the utility of it, is that, while God's magnificence gives us a superabundance of grace, that superabundance is not in reality a superfluity. We have not a grace which we can afford to spare. Our frequent absolutions are not too frequent for us; nor are our many Communions, if under obedience, too many. One grace may be enough in itself to save a soul; but it will not save it if it was not precisely meant to do so. It does not derogate from God's magnificence that we should stand absolutely in need of its grand largeness. But the knowledge of this necessity gives us a truer view of our wretchedness, and fosters our humility.

—*The Precious Blood*

A Huge Fortune Swiftly Made and Marvelously Secured

A man goes forth from his house into the streets of a city in a state of mortal sin. The weight of God's wrath and the curse of the blood of Christ are heavy on his soul. To the angels he is a sight of unutterable loathing and disgust, if his state is known to them. He would not dare to have his sins whispered in the crowd, for the contempt even of his fellow sinners would crush him to the earth. He is the slave of the dark demon, in a bondage more foul, more degrading, more tyrannical, more abject, than the horrors of African slavery can show. In his breast, though he hardly knows it, he has the beginnings of hell,

and the germs of everlasting hatred of Almighty God. Cain, savage and gloomy and restless, wandering curse-goaded over the unpeopled earth, was not worse off than he, perhaps better. In the street he meets a funeral, or he comes across a priest by whose demeanor he perceives that he has got the Blessed Sacrament with him. Thoughts crowd into his mind. Faith is awake and on the watch. Grace disposes him for grace. The veil falls from sin; and he turns from the hideous vision with shame, with detestation with humility. The eye of his soul glances to his crucified Redeemer. Fear has led the way for hope, and hope has the heart to resolve, and faith tells him that his resolution will be accepted, and he loves—how can he help loving Him who will accept so poor a resolution? There is a pressure on his soul. It is less than the sting of a bee, even if it hurts at all. Yet it was the pressure of the Creator, omnipotent, immense, all-holy and incomprehensible, on his living soul. The unseen Hand was laid on him only for a moment. He has not passed half a dozen shop-fronts, and the work is done. He is contrite. Hell is vanquished All the angels of heaven are in a stir of joy. His soul is beautiful. God is yearning over it with love and with ineffable desire. It needs only one cold touch of death, and an eternity of glory lies with all its vast and spacious realms of Vision before him. Neither is he simply as the dropping off of sin's chains had left him; but as if from some secret depths of God's creation, there come back to him a bright and goodly multitude, the merits of years of grace which had gone from him when he sinned; he is clothed in such a nuptial garment of spiritual beauty as would blind the natural eye with its imperial magnificence, and to which all the many-colored pageants of the world are but as dismal, misty, mournful shadows. Yet this work, so beautiful, so wonderful, so altogether worthy of the Divine Perfections, is not done once only, or now and then, or periodically, or to make an epoch in the world's history; it is being accomplished in a thousand confessionals this day and at this hour, and in churches, in hospitals, in prisons, on shipboard,

on the scaffold, in the streets and fields of daily labor, close to the mower or the reaper or the gardener or the vine-dresser, who dreams not that God is in his neighborhood, so busy and at so stupendous a work. For to turn a child of Satan into a son of God is so tremendous a work that St. Peter Chrysologus says of it, that the angels are astonished, heaven marvels, earth trembles, flesh cannot bear it, ears cannot take it in, the mind cannot reach it, the whole creation is too weak to endure its magnitude, is short of intellect to esteem it rightly, and is afraid of believing it, because it is so much.

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

The Easiness of Salvation

Divine love is at once creative, redeeming, sanctifying, uncreated, and without respect of persons. As creative, it was not content to call angels and men out of nothing, but it constituted them at the outset in a state of grace, which was not connatural to them, and was in no way due to their nature. As redeeming, it pursued men when they fell; and at no less an expense than the Incarnation of One of the Divine Persons, and with every circumstance of attraction and prodigality, it brought them back again when they had sold themselves as slaves to evil. As sanctifying, it is incessant in its visitations of grace, marvelous in the heights of sanctity to which it can raise those whom sin has sunk so low. As uncreated, it is especially astonishing and adorable; it naturally includes, and while it includes, surpasses, all created ties and all diversities of human love. As without respect of persons, it enables us to repose our trust, not only on the all-efficacious power of God, but upon that beautiful justice and exquisite fidelity which are the true foundations of our love.

In this love of God we have already passed an eternity. In this love we have lived without beginning. He has never seen His glorious Word, but He has seen us in Him, and the mutual love of Father and Son from the first has scattered its brightness

on our foreseen lives. There is something awful in such enduring love, something which overshadows the spirits of creatures so capricious and inconstant as ourselves. It frightens us that we should have been loved eternally. At the same time, what must be the necessary efficacy of an eternal love? Here is a very mine of golden consolation. He who has not ceased to love us from forever, will not lightly withdraw His love. He will not easily surrender to His enemies a creature whom He has borne in His bosom like a nurse from the beginning. Into the least of His blessings He pours an endless love. There are no infirmities that He disdains, no prayers which He disregards. He cannot love otherwise than with an overflowing love, rewarding the most trivial actions, canonizing the most transitory wishes, and placing around every step of life such a retinue of graces, such an attendance of angels, such an apparatus of sacraments, that the self-will must be strong indeed which can break away from God and lose itself.

He apparently consults our interests rather than His own by making, in reality, the last identical with the first. His first thought for sinners is to make repentance easy and light; and strange indeed are the things to which His wisdom can persuade His justice, or His goodness bend His sanctity. By His own order, our liberty seems to take precedence of His law while the whole of creation is apparently disposed for the convenience of our salvation. The increase of this love depends upon ourselves. On this side of the grave we can have it when we will, and there is always grace to enable us to ask it and to will it. The more we ask, the more He will give, and reckon the obligation to be on His side rather than on ours. All that is wanted of us is to take God's side, to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, and, to sum up all in one word, to belong to Jesus Christ. . . .

But, it may be objected, all this is so much special pleading for God. It does not state man's case fairly, because it does not state it completely. There are certain phenomena which are prac-

tical objections to this view, and they have hardly been considered. This is what may be said. I do not own the justice of it, because, as I have said before, if I understand rightly what it is to be a creature, and what it is to have a Creator, I do not see how the creature can have any side at all. It appears that God's side is also the creature's side, and that he can have no other. If we imagine for ourselves an immensely benevolent despot, in possession of the most legitimate claims upon our obedience but bound, by the rectitude of his own character, as well as by our rights, to the exercise of commutative justice, and call him the Creator, under such a being we should obviously have a side of our own, and a point of view belonging to us. But this is no adequate description of God. It is only an uneasy intellectual creation of our own. But, if there be a chance of gaining any more love for God from the hearts of His creatures, most willingly would we engage in the task of meeting these objections; the more willingly, because the soil to be turned up is so rich, concerning, as it does, the Creator's love of His creatures, that it will bloom with fresh and fresher blossoms, almost before the plough has furrowed up the surface.

Our object, however, is strictly a practical one. Hence we are not going to enter into any of the abstruse questions about the origin of evil, or the existence of hell, or the permission of idolatry, or the eternal destiny of those outside the Church. We are speaking to the children of the Church; and however dark such questions may be to them, or however worthy of their most vigorous intellectual research, they have no right to be practical difficulties to a Catholic in pursuit of holiness. Strictly speaking, we have no right to have any difficulties at all; for a speculative difficulty can hardly become a practical one to men who take the teaching of the Church on faith; and men who do not, how shall they dream of attaining holiness at all? Nevertheless, there are some questions which, if not without fault of ours, at least without grievous fault, tease and molest us, and become not unfrequently, sometimes the sources, and at other times, the

hotbeds, of temptation. Of these we may select three, especially because in handling them, we shall implicitly and indirectly answer many more. The first is the difficulty of salvation; the ultimate fate of the great multitude of the faithful, the second; and the third, the perplexing question of worldliness. . . .

Though it is true that God cannot both leave us free and constrain us to be saved, yet His redeeming love might be expected to make such allowances for the unhappy degradation of man by sin, as to make his salvation not a work of more than ordinary difficulty. Surely, these allowances are implied in the very notion of redemption. If heaven be not easy of access, neither its beauty, nor the generosity with which it is offered, are such motives of love as they would be on the contrary supposition. The most perfectly satisfactory answer to the objection, if it be true, is that salvation is easy. We are speaking only to and of believers, and are not concerning ourselves with a secret which God has reserved for Himself, and into which we do not attempt to penetrate, even by guesses, because it has no practical bearing on our own service of God. To a believer, salvation is easy; so easy, in fact, that to each individual soul in the Church, the chances are greatly in favor of his salvation. This may not be true of him at any given moment, as when he has relapsed into sin, or when he is enfeebled by a long, wilful captivity to sinful habits, but, looking at his life as a whole, and considering things in the long run, it is true that the chances are greatly in favor of his salvation; and I have my misgivings that I am even thus understating his prospects of success. His life must be a life of efforts; but the efforts are easy—easy in themselves, easy in their auxiliaries, easy in both the prospect of a future and the enjoyment of a present reward. What else is the meaning of our Lord's words "Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light" (Matt. 11:28–30). Or, again, what can be more distinct than the words

of St. John: "For this is the charity of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not heavy. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith" (1 John 5:3–4).

The first point, then, for us to consider is the easiness of salvation in itself. Let no one be afraid that, if the affirmative of this proposition be proved, it will make any of us sluggish and indifferent in the pursuit of Christian perfection. Divine truth is continually exerting an influence and putting forth an attraction, which baffle and deride the guesses and predictions of our human criticism. If the view be true, it will lead men to love God who do not love Him now, and it will lead those who love Him already to love Him more. It is not the fear of hell which draws men to aim at perfection, nor is it the ambition to be saints which buoys them up through mortification, weariness, and prayer. It is the beauty of God which has touched them and taken them captive; and whatever discloses more of that beauty will be but a stronger attraction enabling them to scale higher summits. So, while our enquiry will give us sweet and hopeful views of sinners, it will also humble, edify, and stimulate ourselves, if we are trying to advance in the ways of God.

—*Creator and Creature*

Looking at the World Redeemed

Now let us come out under the starry sky, and think of this prodigality of the Precious Blood. The great tent of heaven above us seems to waver, and the stars to swing like lamps from its purple roof. But the desert could not be more silent than this outspread scene. If the uninstructed man looks at the starry skies, he either feels no mystery in them, or feels that it is a mystery which he cannot understand. Some feeling which, if it is not poetry, is akin to poetry, and which, if it is not religion is akin to religion, would surely be awakened in him. But all would be vague, restless, and uncertain and would therefore soon weary

him, and so be transient and speedily forgotten. The astronomer would look on the loveliness of this spangled night with far other eyes. His knowledge would disentangle the constellations for his eyes. The orbs would be individuals to him with names, known points, and some peculiarities. The purple concave would at once inscribe itself for him with glittering lines and orbits, better than grooved spheres of Ptolemy. It would be a joy to him to inform so much seeming confusion with so much real order. He might think little of the beauty of night, and still less of the beauty of the God of night. But the scene would speak in grand sonorous language to his understanding. Then let us bring a poet to the place. He might know as little of the mechanism of the heavens as the uninstructed man. But he would understand the scene by feeling it. He would feel that the starry heavens outside corresponded marvelously with the starry heavens within him. Behold him. His soul is taken captive with the beauty of the night. He looks. He grows calm with a sweet calmness. Breathings as of far-off music rise up from some deep sanctuary within his soul. The beauty melts him; the glory masters him; and he sings the infinity of God. Both the astronomer and the poet have their truth. But the poet's truth is a truer truth than that of the astronomer.

So it is in looking at the world redeemed. The uninstructed man sees nothing in it but puzzle and contradiction. His faith is vague and where faith is not clear there is seldom earnestness. There is truly a look of God about the world, and a wandering fragrance of Jesus. But it breeds little more in him than a kind of incredulous superstition. To the uninstructed believer who is without the poetry of religion, whose head errs because his heart does not help it, whose thoughts go wrong because they are speculations instead of prayer—to him the aspect of redemption is what the starry skies are to the astronomer. He admires; he is amazed; he praises. Yet adoration is so little to his taste, and worship so uncongenial to his disposition, that the demand for it at once awakens a kind of skepticism even in his faith. He

doubts whether so much be done, because he sees so little come of it. He judges by what he sees with the eye. He does not know how to divine with his heart. He does not perceive that the world he sees is nearly as far beyond his understanding as the God who is invisible. Sight does not help us to understand men. Their actions are not their hearts. Still less does it help us to understand grace, which, when it supernaturalizes nature, lies undermost, not uppermost. To understand God and God's world, we must look at Him and it from the Precious Blood point of view. The saints of the Church are the poets of redemption. It is from this point of view that they always see the world. It was thus that Mary saw the world at all times, a vision most awful, yet most touching and most dear. It is the way in which God sees at this instant. All things to Him, good or evil, are tinged with the Precious Blood. He beholds them all in His own repetition of Josue's miracle, in that unsinking crimson sunset of the Previous Blood, which He has bidden to hang in all its beauty on the horizon of creation forever.

—*The Precious Blood*

The Crucifixion

Men can lie for hours and look upon a running stream. It seems to afford them at once occupation and repose. Its uninterrupted sameness fills them with tranquility, while its unintermitting lapse gratifies their sense of life. They feel that they are thinking; yet they are hardly conscious of their thoughts. Their eye is fixed with a sort of fascination on the noiseless gliding waters, and they are soothed, rested, and engaged. This is a faint picture of what often happens to us in our prayers, especially with regard to certain mysteries, such as the Crucifixion, which is the sixth Bloodshedding. It is so familiar to us that, like the river, we understand it all at sight. We cannot reason about it. It is too much part of our daily lives for that. We do not need to elicit the right affections, for they come unbidden, and flow

in an order of their own. The significance of the mystery is at once too deep and too plain for words. It is so vast an object of faith, that simply to gaze upon it seems to be the broadest study of it. Moreover, like all large objects, it is one of those mysteries which are best seen at some distance. We see the whole of it then. We comprehend its size, its shape, its fashion, and the disposition of the groups round about it. Who does not know the strange, vivid, palpable peace which distance gives to sunlit vistas in a forest? There is something of this kind about meditation on the Crucifixion. How almost visionary looks the bone-strewn sward and the tufted grass of that green hill-top, with its crosses standing against the sky, and a kind of wan sunshine creeping up the mound, as if it came rather from the white roofs of the city than from the sun of heaven! The Precious Blood has been out in the vast calms and ocean-solitudes of the mind of God. It has voyaged through the beautiful tranquilities of the creations of spirit, matter, and men. Its lanterns have gleamed like red beacons in the unspeakable tempests of the divine anger, in falls of angels and of men, in floods and fires, in judgments and captivities, in discordant panics of Babel and bituminous upheavings of Gomorrah. It has kept its course over thousands of years of the uneasy currents of human history; and lo! that hill-top was all the while its haven! The Cross was its predestinated anchor, holding it to earth. How marvelous a harbor! How like one of those plans of God, which are so little like any plan of ours. The Precious Blood has found at last a home, which is seemingly dearer to it than the Sacred Heart. It is the wood of the Cross.

—*The Precious Blood*

A Concordat

Let us trace from the first the processes by which God vouchsafes to save a soul.

Not many days elapse after a child of Catholic parents is

born, before he is carried to the baptismal font. There, by the almost momentary action of pouring water in the Name of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity, the child is regenerated. Nothing can be more easy or more instantaneous. Yet, let us consider all that is involved in an infant's baptism. Not only are the eternal consequences of the fall to his particular soul in one instant destroyed, but the child becomes entitled to the most stupendous privileges and inheritance, which would not have been due to him naturally, even if Adam had not fallen. He is at once raised to a far higher state than one of pure nature. He is a child of God. The Divine Nature has been communicated to him by sanctifying grace. Extraordinary possibilities of spiritual developments and earnests of everlasting life have been implanted in him by certain mysteriously infused habits of the theological virtues also. Seven other supernatural habits, standing in the same relation to the actual impulses of the Holy Ghost as the other infused habits stand to actual grace, and which bear the name of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, are also infused into him, containing in themselves spiritual provisions for the greater occasions of his life, for his more intimate intercourse with God, and, if so be, for the magnificent operations of heroic sanctity. Meanwhile, if he dies before the use of reason, there is secured to him the eternal vision of God, with all the intellectual glories of an immortal spirit, whose intelligence had never been developed upon earth at all. Now all this haste, if we may so speak, with which the divine mercy seizes the infant's soul, refusing to wait for his consent, or till he can accept God's great gift by a rational act of his own, implies such a determined and exuberant love on the part of the Creator, that it is not easily to be conceived, that the rest of the process of salvation shall not partake of the same character of divine impatience and facility. . . .

The baptized child, when he comes to the use of reason, finds himself under a code of laws, the object of which is to secure his salvation by prescribing the conditions on which it is to be obtained. These are the ten commandments of God and the six

precepts of the Church. They are few in number and easy of observance, at least easy under ordinary circumstances, and, on occasions when they are difficult, quite marvellous assistances of supernatural grace are prepared and heaped upon the soul. The man finds himself in a world of many pleasures and, of these, comparatively few are sinful; and if the world is full of dangers too, it is always to be remembered that the fatal enemy of the soul, mortal sin, cannot lie in ambush for it or take it by surprise. Full deliberation and advertence are necessary to the commission of a mortal sin. When we think who God is, and ponder his eternal truth and ineffable sanctity, it must be a wonder to us that any sin is venial, that no number of venial sins can make a mortal sin, and that no habits of venial sin, however inveterate, unworthy, deliberate, or against special lights, can themselves destroy the soul. It is wonderful that a man can be graciously visited by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, can feel assured in his own mind that such and such practices or self-denials are really the desire of God in his case, and yet be also sure that those inspirations are not intended as a law, and the resistance of them therefore not a sin, though all want of generosity with God will ultimately and indirectly work its way to sin. Furthermore, the condition of the creature seems to be untruthfulness. Everything is false around us, full of excuse, pretense, and insincerity. Yet falsehood is the very opposite of God who is eternal truth, and it is equally the characteristic of the evil one whom our Lord Himself has named the father of lies. Nevertheless, lying is a venial sin. No number of lies however wilful, so long as they are not sins against justice also, can of themselves destroy the soul.

The whole subject of sin abounds with truths of this description, which are more trying to the faith than the mysteries either of the Holy Trinity or the Eucharist. Thus, the remission of venial sin, one of the most interesting questions in the whole range of theology, appears to be so easy as to be almost unconscious, and to be quite as incessant as its commission. Blessings,

holy water, other sacramentals, the sign of the cross, the name of Jesus, passing acts of sorrow, nay, some have said, any lifting up of the mind to God, and behold! the guilt of these sins falls from us like a withered leaf from an autumnal tree. And what hosts of venial sins, forgotten and unrepented of, may not a man possibly take with him into the next world, as matters for the fires of purgatory, and which can only delay and not prohibit his entrance into glory? All this does not look as if God was a taskmaster, or as if heaven were only for the few. Indeed, the way in which He can show all this leniency and make these singular allowances for our infirmity, and at the same time secure purity of heart and real love for Himself, is the most astonishing phenomenon which falls under the observation of those who have to minister to the consciences of men. . . .

What is said of the doctrine of venial sin may be said also of the doctrine of intention. What duty could seem more simple on the part of a creature than a perpetual application of mind and heart to his Creator? We are not our own and we are not left to ourselves. We are working under our Father's eyes and it is for Him that we are working and at His appointed work. Hence the road to sanctity is by the way of actual intentions for the glory of God. It should be everyone's prime occupation to make his intentions actual. All other virtues will come along with this. Surprising treasures of grace will be unlocked to us if we attempt it. This one practice will turn darkness into light all over our souls, and no sinful habit, however inveterate, can exist in the atmosphere of this most glorious of all spiritual exercises. Yet does anyone believe that an actual intention is absolutely necessary to the goodness of an action? Does God get no glory from man's free will, except when man there and then intends it? It may be a question how long a virtual intention lasts, to what extent it can inform and invigorate our actions, and insinuate a supernatural character into them, or what amount of original intensity is required in the morning's intention to give it momentum enough to push its way through the crowded actions of an

entire solar day. All these may be questions, but no one maintains that any such assiduous application to God as is a notable difficulty to our infirm and easily distracted nature is at all necessary to salvation. . . .

It is a fearful thing for the creature to turn away wholly from the Creator and we can well understand how it should at once destroy the life of grace in the soul. Grace can live with any quantity of venial sin. So long as the eclipse of God in the soul is not total, so long with amazing condescension and, as it were, a blind love of souls, does He continue to dwell within us. But when the eclipse is total, what can follow but total darkness also? This seems inevitable, and yet it is not so. Notwithstanding the horrible malice of mortal sin, as being fully perceived and deliberately admitted, the grand gift of faith, that almost unfailing power of coming right again, survives the commission of mortal sin. The life of hope does not become extinct; nay, it requires a fresh, distinct, and most difficult mortal sin to destroy that supernatural habit, which gives the soul that buoyancy and elasticity requisite to its conversion. Now, is it quite easy to see how two supernatural habits, two heavenly powers, two divine elements, not natural to man but gratuitously infused into him at baptism, are not forfeited and expelled by the extinction of the life of grace in the soul by mortal sin? God is eclipsed in the soul; hell has begun in it, hell's worst punishment, the loss of God; and there are two celestial virtues preaching in the darkness still, conspiring against the reign of evil, holding their fortresses with magnanimous patience, it may be for long, long years of siege, and attracting to themselves incessant crowds of volunteers in the shape of actual graces. Is not all this wonderful? Is it compatible with the theory that salvation is difficult? Is not mortal sin itself, against its will, a new revelation of the pertinacious love of God?

But more still. Of the thousands of souls in the world today, unhappily immersed in the gulfs of mortal sin, is there one whom a whole multitude of beautiful actual graces is not soliciting to

return to God? Oh, such pathetic invitations to come back to Him, such fair lights of God's tender compassion riding over the dark soul like the white sunbeams over a stormy landscape, such sweet remorses, sharp but very sweet, such cold sobering thoughts of future punishment, such wise artful alternations of crosses and consolations, such lifelike speakings of dead books, such barbed words of preachers, such solemn eloquence of the deaths of those we love, such a nameless sensible thraldom of God and grace and heavenly presences which we never can shake off—all these now with a very clamor of assaulting armies, now with low, soft and song-like pleadings, are the forces of actual grace which have never been drawn off from before the gates of the heart, however long they may have been obstinately barred against God by a countless garrison of mortal sins. . . .

The most remarkable feature of the baptized soul's position with regard to mortal sin is the perpetual, unlimited iteration of the sacrament of penance. That there should be such a sacrament at all, after the completeness and magnificence of Baptism, is a miracle of divine love. But that the Precious Blood of the Incarnate Word should be always at hand, like a public fountain at a roadside, open, gratuitous, and everflowing, for the convenience of all passers by, could not be believed if the Church did not assure us of it. Our sheer inability to comprehend a love so great as God's would make simple Novatians of us, if we had not the Church to inform the littleness of our own conceptions by the magnificence of her dogmas. Is it easy to imagine the mercy which will absolve from different mortal sins the same soul perhaps five hundred times in ten or twenty years, and some thousands of times in the course of life? Yet this is not an extravagant or fabulous case. Then again, think of the completeness of the absolution. Each time it destroys the guilt of the sin completely, so that it can never rise again, never bring back, even to the relapsed sinner, its consequences of everlasting punishment, while at the same time it wakens to vigorous life again the merits that have been killed a hundred times by sin. How special, how

ingenious, how peculiar, how unlike anything human is this process; and yet on reflection how naturally outflowing from the divine perfections!

No kind, no number, no duration of sins impede the facility of absolution. Its efficacy is always instantaneous. The word is spoken, and the work is done. But what is still more marvelous is the little which is required for absolution, the ordinary fidelity of the confession, the positive imperfection of the sorrow, the moderate resoluteness of the purpose of amendment! Supernatural as all these must be, the confession, the sorrow, and the purpose, and depending for their validity on certain theological requirements, yet are they not among the commonest graces in the Church? Is attrition a romantic flight of generosity, or the purpose of amendment akin to the heroism of martyrdom? Surely, these requisites for absolution seem completely within the compass of our infirmity. And, after all, it is God Himself who is supplying more than half of them by grace. In truth, this enquiry into the easiness of salvation is beginning to fill us with fear, because it is carrying us so far! But might it not have been expected that, as Penance is more troublesome than Baptism, so each time that the sacrament of Penance is repeated, the requisites for absolution might have been increased, that the sinner should have bidden higher for pardon after every fall and that there should have been at least so much punishment for his relapses as consists in an increase of his difficulties in winning God back to him again? Yet we know that this is not at all the case. The habitual sinner, and he who has once fallen, the sinner of a day, and the sinner of half a century—to all, the simple requisites for absolution remain the same. Nay, even where the confessor exacts from the penitent more convincing evidence of his repentance, it is only the confessor's inevitable infirmity as a creature, and as such unable to read the heart; God leaves the light conditions of absolution just what they were before. If all this were not among God's daily mercies, how inscrutable would it not seem to us; but we are obliged without fault of ours to

tread God's common mercies under foot, because He has so profusely strewn the whole earth with them, that there is not room to move. . . .

There still remains a debt due to God from remitted sin, a debt of temporal punishment. This men may be content to bear, seeing that salvation has been made so easy to them, and the malice of their sins has been so great. But God will not suffer this. Straight from the confessional, the Church leads her son into the fertile and exuberant region of indulgences. There the Precious Blood is made to flow even over the temporal consequences of forgiven sin. God would not stop at mere salvation. It is His way to overflow and exceed. There shall not be a disability in the sinner's path, not a relic of his own foolish covenants with sin, which shall be left to molest him. Nay, the relics of sin shall have a strange sacrament to themselves in the Extreme Unction of the dying. But even this is not enough. Souls must be saved, and the saved multiplied, and the heavenly banquet crowded, even if the constraints of fire be needed to anneal the hastier works of grace. Therefore is it that the realms of purgatory are lighted up with the flames of vindictive love. Thus a huge amount of imperfect charity shall bring forth its thousands and tens of thousands for heaven. Redemption shall cover the whole earth and be plentiful indeed, and the very unworthinesses and shortcomings of the creature shall only still more provoke the prodigality of the Blood of the Creator. Oh, the mercy of those cleansing fires! What could have devised them but a love that was almost beside itself for expedients? Yet, even these fires the sinner can avoid, if he please, and without the difficulties of heroic charity. But they shall be made to cast their light even upon earth before their time and the Precious Blood shall be turned upon them by indulgences, and they shall be quenched before their blistering tongues have touched the sinner's soul. Oh, talk of the difficulty of salvation after this! And what was Divine Love doing, when we last caught a glimpse of it at work? Ah, as at first, so at last, there is the divine impatience, the divine

facility of a Creator who seems as if He could not do without His creatures. We saw love, and it was bending over purgatory, over the net which was almost breaking with the portentous draught of unlikely souls that it had taken. Mary was moving on her throne, the saints were filling heaven with their intercessions; angels were ascending and descending every moment; Mass bells were ringing all over the earth, and beads were being told, and numberless indulgences sealed in thousands of Communions, and alms flowing in to the poor, and penances and pilgrimages were being performed; for Divine Love called loudly on angels, saints, and mortal men to do violence to it, while Jesus supplied the means in His daily Adorable Sacrifice and the plentiful treasury of His Precious Blood. Our last sight of love showed it to us impatiently shortening the appointed time of those suffering souls, and heaven and earth astir, as if some great catastrophe had happened because God Himself seemed as if He wished to cut short by swifter mercies that last grand consummate invention of His creative love, the quiet, unreluctant, beautifying pains of that cleansing fire!

When God came to His creatures visibly, He scandalized them. His three and thirty years were almost a series of scandals taken by cold hearts at what appeared the very extravagances of His condescension. What wonder then that a scheme of salvation so easy, so pliant, so accommodating, so full of arrangement, and so exuberant, should be a scandal to heretics and unbelievers? It is the same Jesus who ate with publicans and sinners, who pleaded with the Samaritan woman, who rewarded the humble petulance of the Syro-Phoenician woman, who acquitted the woman taken in adultery, who absolved the Magdalen and who carried off with Him as His first trophy to an instantaneous paradise the thief who hung upon the cross. And shall we call that process hard, while our Mother, the Church, is maligned all day long for representing it so easy and so large?

—*Creator and Creature*

2.

Intercession

Our Duty of Intercession

But what is prayer? The mystery of prayer? We have need to ask the question if it involves so great a responsibility, and can do so great a work, and if it be in truth a precept that we must pray for others as well as for ourselves. There are many things which go to make up a true account of prayer. First, we must consider who we are who pray. None could have a more ignoble origin. We were created out of nothing, and we came into the world with the guilt and shame of sin on our souls, and the burden of a hideous penalty which eternal lamentation never could remit. To this, our original disgrace, we have added all manner of guilt and treason and rebellion, of irritability and disrespect of our own. There are no words which could exaggerate our malice, no description which could convey a fair idea of our helpless ignorance. Everything about us was little to begin with and we have made it immeasurably less. It is hard to conceive ourselves worse than we are; so much so that it is necessary to

make it a duty to be patient and forbearing with ourselves quite as much as with others. Then, next, we must consider to whom it is that we pray. The infinitely blessed Majesty of God, than which nothing can be conceived more good, more holy, more pure, more august, more adorable, more compassionate, more incomprehensible, or more unutterable. The very thought of God takes away our breath. He is three living Persons. We live, and move, and breathe in Him. He can do what He wills with us. He is no further bound to us than He has graciously and piteously chosen to bind Himself. He knows everything without our telling or asking Him. Yet it is to Him we pray. Next, let us think where it is we pray. Whether it be a consecrated place or not, it is to God Himself. We are in the midst of Him as fishes are in the sea. His immensity is our temple. His ear lies close to our lips. It touches them. We do not feel it; if we did, we should die. It is always listening. Thoughts speak to it as loudly as words; sufferings even more loudly than words. His ear is never taken away. We sigh into it while we sleep and dream.

Next, let us ask whence comes the value of our prayers? They are fleeting words; fugitive petitions. There is nought in us to give ground for a hearing, except the very excessiveness of our unworthiness and, therefore, the extremity of our need. Their value comes principally from this—that God Himself has vouchsafed to become man, has lain out upon the inclement mountains, and spent the night in prayer. He makes our cause His, His interests ours, and we become one with Him. So by a mysterious communion, the work of His prayers runs into our prayers, the wealth of His enriches the poverty of ours, the infinity of His touches, raises and magnifies the wretchedness of ours. So that when we pray it is not we who pray, but He who prays. We speak into our Heavenly Father's ear and it is not our voice but the voice of Jesus, like His Mother's voice, that God vouchsafes to hear. . . . Neither is this an end of the inventions of His paternal love, for we must next inquire with whom it is that we pray. Never alone; of this we are sure whenever we rightly pray.

There is one dwelling in us who is co-equal, co-eternal God, proceeding from the Father and the Son. He forms the words in our hearts and then puts music in our cry when we exclaim "Abba, Father!" He is our "access" to the Father. He "strengthens us with might unto the inward man." He makes us "speak to ourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things, in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father"; He is the Spirit in whom "we pray at all times, by all prayer and supplication, and watch in the same, with all instance and supplication, for all the Saints." He is the Spirit "who helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings; and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the Spirit desireth." Oh then, does not the mystery of prayer deepen upon us?

Next, look at the incredible ease of prayer. Every time, place, posture is fitting; for there is no time, place or posture in which and by which we cannot reverently confess the Presence of God. Talent is not needed. Eloquence is out of place. Dignity is no recommendation. Our want is eloquence, our misery our recommendation. Thought is quick as lightning and quick as lightning can it multiply effectual prayer. Actions can pray; sufferings can pray. There need be no ceremonies; there are no rubrics to keep. The whole function is expressed in a word; it is simply this—the child at his father's knee, his words stumbling over each other from their very earnestness, and his wistful face pleading better than his hardly intelligible prayer.

Then consider the efficacy of prayer. We have only to pray for lawful things, to pray for them often and perseveringly and to believe that we shall receive them, and receive them, too, not according to the poverty of our foolish intentions but according to the riches, and munificence and the wisdom of God; and it is an infallible truth that we shall receive them. God is at our disposal. He allows us almost unbounded influence over Him, not

merely once or twice, not only on feasts or great occasions, but all our lives long. Are there any of the mysteries of grace sweeter than this? . . .

Then, last of all, it is not for ourselves alone He lets us pray, but for others also. Nay, He expressly commands us to make intercessory prayer. Through His apostle, He speaks with that positive and unusual form, "I desire first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made by all men" and in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, when the apostle says, "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the Spirit desireth"; he adds, "because He asketh for the Saints according to God." Thus, the inestimable privilege, the mysterious gift of prayer, is given to us not merely for our own necessities, but that we may use it for the temporal and spiritual good of others. How strict an account we shall have to render for so great a favor, and how careful we should be that this power should not be intrusted to us in vain! Whatever other talents God may not have given to us, this one, without doubt, He has given to us. There is no distinction of persons. Young and old, rich and poor, learned and simple, priest and lay, religious and secular, we are all of us bound to the practice of intercessory prayer. Woe unto us if we hide our talent, or venture to return it to our Judge, at the last unfruitful! Let each one examine himself and see what time he has hitherto given to this devotion and whether the past is in this respect altogether what he would have it to be. To pray always is a hard precept and one we can only come to by time and habit, as well as by gift and grace. But the thing is to find that the older we grow, the more we pray, and that the more we pray the more our prayer takes the line of intercession for others.

Perhaps never, while we are on earth, shall we realize the heavenly might of prayer, nor the exceeding riches of that treasure, which now, alas! we make so light of, seeing not how thereby God's glory is so much within our power. Oh, what might we not do by prayer! What might we not do in every remotest corner

of the earth, in the cells of purgatory, and in the open courts of heaven! Yet the times are against prayer; the spirit of the age is against it. Oh! for faith in prayer! for only faith in prayer! for faith in simple prayer! and the interests of Jesus shall spread like a beneficent conquest all over the world, and the glory of God shall beautifully cover the earth as the abounding waters cover the bed of the sea, and the choirs of redeemed souls shall multiply and multiply, till the Good Shepherd should be, were it not any other than He, overladen with the sheaves of His prolific Passion!

Heaven opens sometimes and gives us a glimpse of the potency of prayer. See how it opened on Saint Gertrude. She was divinely instructed that as often as the angelic salutation is devoutly recited by the faithful on earth, three efficacious streamlets proceed from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, most sweetly penetrating the Blessed Virgin's heart. Then from her heart again with efficacious impetuosity, they seek their fountains, and break at the foot of God's throne, as a sunny wave breaks upon a rock, leaving her most powerful after the Father, most wise after the Son, and most benignant after the Holy Spirit. These streams, while the Ave Maria is being said, flow around the Blessed Virgin superabundantly; and with potent impetus, flow back again upon her most holy heart. So, with marvelous delectation, I am using Saint Gertrude's words, they seek their fountain first, and then rebounding back, bright drops of joy and bliss and eternal salvation are sprinkled over all the persons of the saints and angels, nay more, over those who on earth are commemorating that same salutation, whereby is renewed in everyone all the good which he has ever, up to this time, received through the most salutary Incarnation. Yet, what is more easy than to say a devout Hail Mary? And if this be true of the Ave, what also of the Pater and the Credo, and the Missal prayers, and ejaculations from the Gospel? Do we know what we are doing, and where we are living, and what is all around us, and how far our influence goes, and where our responsibilities

end? And have we measured our privileges, and taken the height of our dignity, and fathomed the depths of grace? We are beset by our own greatness. We work miracles, and know it not. We move the heavens, yet we ourselves are in thoughtless rest on earth. The mystery is too much for us; the problem too hard; the supernatural quite oppressive. But the comfort is we shall do all things well, use all powers, satisfy all duties, be equal to all dignities, exhaust all blessings, if only we will serve Jesus with pure intention and out of love. Once go forth upon the earth, and live, move, breathe, speak, act, think, joy and sorrow, toil and rest, welcome and suffer, *all for Jesus* and we need have no other thought, no other rule. . . . Now, we may not be able to preach, write books, traverse distant lands as missioners, or to give money to send others there. It may be little indeed that of ourselves and by our actions we can do for God's glory or for the conversion of souls. But intercession reaches everywhere. Neither time nor place bound it. Ignorance cannot keep it out, nor superstition silence it, nor sin refuse to stay within its influence. . . .

We hear of some land where God's glory is endangered. There is some country, perhaps, where the civil power is at variance with the Holy See, than which nothing is more adverse to God's glory, more injurious to the interests of Jesus, or more fatal to the cause of souls. Or, again we read with burning eyes and heart of the spiritual destitution of distant countries, or of the persecutions and tiring vexations of the Catholic clergy under heretical dominion, or of Catholic cities of scandalous profligacy, or of the wily plots of anti-ecclesiastical diplomacy, or of the depression of religious orders, or of disedifying controversies and foolish parties and silly questions. There is no saying to what extent God's glory is compromised by any one of these things. We may be the weakest and most obscure among the Church's children; yet we can reach all this by intercession, and reach it, too, with efficacy and power. We may work for it without interruption; our ordinary actions may go to it; we may do more

than all the ambassadors and legates that ever were; and yet not for an hour be distracted from our profession or our trade. We shall never know, till it meets us at the judgment, a goodly show, a beautiful vision, how much glory we have thus gained for God without cost, without toil, almost without advertence, yet with such infinite and eternal recompense.

In like manner also shall we by intercession advance the interests of Jesus. There is something very touching to our affections to see how our dear Lord has vouchsafed, if I may say it, to leave His work unfinished in order that our love of Him may have the joy of finishing it. Saint Paul might well say that he rejoiced in his sufferings for the Colossians because thus he "filled up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in his flesh for the Lord's Body, which is His Church." It is a great artifice of our Savior's love that He has chosen to be so dependent upon us for the harvest of His Cross and Passion; and we must have cold hearts indeed if it does not move us. Take any temptation from which you suffer yourself. How wearisomely it dogs you, how miserably it entraps you; how it is always wakeful, always fixing itself on every good work, devotion, penance, prayer! How tired you get of resisting, how often you unhappily consent, how still more often you are teased and disquieted because you cannot make out whether you have consented or not. Yet every moment of resistance is a supernatural act, a victory of grace, an interest of Jesus. Nay, so also is every sorrow over a fall, every ejaculation sent up arrow-like to heaven, every naming of Jesus and Mary on the confines and in the risk of sin. Now how many thousands are there all the world over who are wearily fighting with the same temptation, and possibly under more disadvantageous circumstances than yourself? See then how many interests of Jesus you can reach by intercession in this single respect: and I am purposely selecting a very trifling matter, trifling, that is, in comparison with other things where our Blessed Lord is yet more concerned. Do at least as much as this: intercede for those who are being tempted with the same

temptation as yourself. Intercession can ruin unspeakable haunts of sin. If we can do such an immense work for Jesus with scarcely any trouble to ourselves, can we think we love Him if we are not doing it? It is the old story of Peter's drowsiness: the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. How we can love Jesus and not practice intercession is unintelligible. . . .

One of the most divine and striking characteristics of the Catholic religion is the communion of saints, the way in which everything belongs to everybody, and nobody has any spiritual property of his own. The merits and satisfactions of our dear Lord, the joys and woes of Mary, the patience of the martyrs and confessors, and the purity of virgins, they all belong to all of us. Just as the blood circulates from and to the heart all over the body, so in the church there is no separation. Heaven, purgatory, and earth, it is all one body. We interchange our merits, we circulate our prayers, we pass on our joys, we infect with our troubles, we use each other's satisfactions as they come to hand. We have all sorts of relations with heaven, and we know exactly how to manage them. As to purgatory, we have a regular science and endless practical methods for it, and we are quite at home with them. And on earth, kith and kin, blood and country, Jew and Greek, Scythian, bond and free, it is all one. This is what strikes heretics as so very portentous about us. We talk of the other world as if it was a city we were familiar with from long residence. We are not stopped by death. Sight is nothing to us; we go beyond it as calmly as possible. We are not separated from our dead. We know the saints a great deal better than if we had lived with them upon earth. We talk to the angels in their different choirs as if they were, as indeed they are, our brothers in Christ. We use beads, medals, crucifixes, holy water, indulgences, sacraments, sacrifices, for all this, as naturally as pen, ink, or paper, or axe and saw, or spade and rake for our earthly work. We are one household; the blessed Lord God is our Father; his dear Majesty is our affair; our Elder Brother created us and has our nature; the angels and saints are all the

kindest and most familiar of brothers; Mary is our Mother; there is no constraint about it all; the air of the place is simply an intense filial love of the Father whom we all adore; so that our reverence is a children's reverence and our fear is a children's fear. How can they understand this who live outside the household? Must it not necessarily seem to them a system of human mysteries, an unscriptural fabrication? They are "strangers and foreigners"; how can they divine the ways and feelings and the sympathies of the "fellow-citizens of the saints and domestics of God"? They can read the words but they can know nothing of the heat and life, the strength and perception, the health and love which are in them; so that a veil is over their hearts, truly their hearts rather than their understandings, when Paul is read; for they who would understand the edifying of the body of Christ must first "all meet into the unity of faith," and so needful is this right faith, that it is the "truth" that we "must do in charity in order that we may in *all things* grow up in Him who is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, being compactly and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation of the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity." Thus it is that intercessory prayer, practiced as a system, persevered in and resorted to by a kind of instinct, has always been almost a note of the true Church, and is even charged upon her by her opponents as part and parcel of pharisaical proselytism. . . .

Orlandini says of Father Peter Faber that he embraced in the bosom of his charity the whole human race, without exception, and had his hands full of business for everybody with God. The more lost and profligate a man was, the more his pity kindled toward him. And that he might put greater vehemence into his prayers, he excited and elevated them with the deepest reflections. When he prayed for people, he put them before himself as redeemed with the Precious Blood of Christ, as Christ's heirs, as Christ's kingdom, so that he stirred up his own affectionate zeal by thus realizing their dignity and price, while at the same

time he offered to God the merits of Christ and His saints the more nobly and feelingly, until at length, by this simple practice, he accustomed himself to entertain quite a magnificent opinion of everybody. . . .

But let us see for whom especially these intercessions should be offered. Spiritual writers give us different recommendations. I shall follow here, as so often before, the Jesuit, Lancisius.

1. For those who are in mortal sin, or out of the true Church. . . . It was revealed to Saint Catherine of Siena that self-love had infected the world, as if it had drunk poison; it comes from pride and holds every sort of evil in itself. Thus the Eternal Father said to her: "Do you therefore, my servants, prepare yourselves with mercy, supplications, and anxious desires, grieving over the offenses committed against Me and also over the damnation of sinners themselves and so you will mitigate the wrath of My Divine Judgment." Here, you see, is another practice hinted to us, prayer against self-love in all souls throughout the world. If you suffer from it yourself, pray for the deliverance of others from it. This is an artifice of the spiritual life that never fails. . . .

Saint Teresa gives this as a reason for founding her convents, that, as there are so many who offend God, nuns ought to pray for their conversion, and with especial assiduity for the defenders of the Church, and particularly for preachers, and other learned men who maintain the truth. The whole forty years, during which she thus exercised herself in prayer, she asked nothing so much of God as the spread of His glory and the augmentation of the Church; and she was willing to remain ever so long in purgatory, if she could make God better known and loved by men. In a like spirit, Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzi earnestly recommended her nuns to pray ardently for the salvation of souls and the conversion of sinners and said this exercise was very pleasing to God, as well as profitable to their own salvation. When our Blessed Lady sent St. Ignatius to the same St. Mary Magdalene to instruct her in the practice of humility, he ended his instruction with these words: "As the Incarnate Word constituted His

apostles fishers of men, so He appointed His spouses, that is, nuns, to make a prey of souls." . . .

2. For those who are in lukewarmness and tepidity. For these are on the very verge of great sins, and yet they are in the state of grace at present. Their necessity is great and so they claim our charity. Their renewal to favor, if they fall, is very difficult, more so than the conversion of sinners, and so it is a great glory to God. Jesus has given them the first grace; He has converted them, and now He is on the point of losing them; His interests are in danger. As God has been pleased to reveal His special distaste for the lukewarm, so it would be very acceptable to Him if we made prayer and penance for the lukewarm one of our special devotions. Next to the devotion for the souls in purgatory, I should venture to rank this devotion for the renewal of the lukewarm. Our dear Lord! How He seems to suffer in them! And, if they be lost, what graces will have been in vain, what sacraments wasted, what a triumph for our Lord's enemy! I beg you to think of this and, when you think of it, to think of me. It is a devotion of much love and many graces. And perhaps you may not have thought of it before.

3. The multiplication of saints and their final perseverance. The glory of God, the good of souls, and the interests of Jesus are all implicated here; and that in so many and in such ways that I need hardly stop to point them out to you; they are obvious. One saint is worth a million of common Catholics. Our Lord said even a stronger thing to Saint Teresa, that one soul, not a saint, but *seeking* perfection, was more precious to Him than a thousand living common lives. It is astonishing how unsupernatural we are, even in our devotions: and how we let natural principles and natural activity carry us away, even in spiritual things, and when we are doing God's work. . . .

4. For all those the world over who are in various necessities and tribulations, whether spiritual or temporal. Hear what Orlandini says of Father Peter Faber whom Saint Francis of Sales used to revere as if he were canonized. It increased the grief and

sorrow of this tender-hearted man that the majority of people do not know how to refer their affairs and miseries to God, but rely upon human helps while they neglect the divine ones. This vehemently stimulated his compassion so that he laid before God the calamities of all men and became a suppliant for them in all their straits, troubles, misfortunes and necessities. He pleaded all their causes with God as if he had been appointed in some special way the common father of the whole world. It is quite incredible with what zeal he yearned to be the minister of our dear Redeemer and, by Him, to aid everyone in his griefs; nay, if it may be said, he yearned, in spite of his humility, to do miracles to relieve those evils the cure of which is beyond the bounds of nature.

5. For the necessities of our benefactors, among whom are to be reckoned our enemies, because they give us occasions of merit, and help us on the road to heaven. Saint Agnes said to Saint Bridget, "Nothing is more lovely or more acceptable with God, than to love those who injure us, and to pray for our persecutors." Saint Chrysostom, speaking of David and Saul, tells us that "It is reckoned to us as martyrdom if we count our enemy as our benefactor, and do not cease to pray for him." Father Mansinelli, a very holy priest of the seventeenth century who was particularly devoted to intercessory prayer, was once given a vision of the glory of Saint Lawrence, and among other lights that he then received was this one—that we ought earnestly to pray for our benefactors, not only because of the gifts and temporal goods conferred upon us, but because of the affection of charity with which they were given, and which is of greater esteem than the gifts themselves. Both are to be repaid, the gifts by labor and assiduity in prayer, the affection of charity by loving our benefactors and getting them grace from God. We must also in our gratitude respond to their intention for the Divine honor and love, for our benefactors bestowed their favors upon us with a view to God. So we, in like manner to recompense this their reverence, love and tenderness toward God in the giving of alms,

must wish well to them, and beg of God that they may be promoted to serve God more and more by works of charity.

6. For all those who are seriously occupied in the pursuit of Christian perfection, and for whatever they desire in order to that end, though it may involve pain and suffering. For this is the common appetite of the Saints, and it is lawful to ask it for them if they are rightly asking it for themselves; because it is good for God's glory, for the interests of Jesus, and for the bringing to penance multitudes of souls. . . .

7. It may be added here that some writers recommend prayer for the increase of the accidental glory of the blessed in heaven. For instance, when a religious prays that those of his order may live holily, or that some of them may be canonized, the founder (seeing it in God, or God making it known to him) gains an increase of accidental glory; it is in this sense priests pray in the Mass that the sacrifice may profit the Saints to their honor. Thus, Innocent III says: "Many, or rather, most think it not unworthy that the glory of the Saints should be capable of increase up to the day of judgment, and, therefore, that the Church may lawfully desire for them this increase of their glorification." . . .

8. There is another intercessory devotion of such great beauty, that the simple statement of it will be its sufficient recommendation. This is to be found in the life of Marie-Denise de Martignat, one of the first religious of the Visitation. She spent almost the first fifty years of her life in the courts of France and Savoy, but the spirit of the world never passed upon her heart, any more than the smell of fire upon the garments of the three children in the fiery furnace. . . . Hence, during her whole life she possessed an enlightened compassion for the rich and made special intercession for them. She said it was a greater charity to pray for them than for those who were languishing in hospitals and prisons. . . . She declared that nothing ought to humble and encourage Christians more than the sanctity of great people who have kept humility in the midst of glory and have used this world as if they used it not. She celebrated the feasts of canon-

ized kings, queens, princes, and princesses with a particular reverence and special devotion. She was accustomed to fast on the vigils of these feasts and all her prayers on those days were for the salvation of great people. There is something extremely touching in this devotion, so truly spiritual, considerate, and heavenly.

It is in harmony with her special devotion that we read toward the conclusion of her life, that one day the superioress asked her if it was worth while to ask a certain favor of a person of very high rank. She replied, "Yes, my dear Mother, do it. I assure you it is a very great charity to princes and to great people to make them do good works. The world, the flesh, and the devil make them do so many bad ones, and one day they will return more thanks to us who have been the cause of their giving alms than we gave them for the alms we procured from them." When she heard of the death of Louis XIII, she said: "I saw him crowned, I saw him married, I saw him reigning, and now he is no more!" Somebody asked her if she would pray for him and she said, "Yes, more than people would believe; for, however well he lived, and however well he died, he may still have something to satisfy for to the equitable justice of the King of Kings. He is gone into a kingdom which is conquered only by the humble of heart. No one goes there sceptre in hand." . . .

The time, place, and method of intercession may be left to everyone's choice, but some suggestions may be offered: Have a particular day in the week for particular objects as for the pope, for all clergy and religious orders, for all in mortal sin, for all in their agony, for the lukewarm, for those in sorrow, for those whom God wishes us particularly to pray for. Or, to have a scheme of thirty objects for the days of the month: to note down objects in writing and keep it in our missal or prayer-book; to visit the Blessed Sacrament . . . exciting affections of zeal for the Divine honor, and of loving solicitude for the interests of Jesus; to agree with our Lord to take some word, or ejaculation, or offering which shall stand for all our objects, and use it at Mass and Communion, in our thanksgiving, before and after

meditation, rosary, and examen, etc.; in short intervals of unexpected leisure or in our ordinary occupations to have recourse to intercession.

And so practices might be multiplied almost infinitely. The best will be those which are the most simple, come naturally, and rise out of our usual devotional exercises; only remember that one of the objects for which we came into this world was to make intercessory prayer. One of the ends for which our blessed Savior shed His Precious Blood was that we might make efficacious intercession. One of the things that God is waiting for us to do now is intercession. Yet how much time do we habitually spend in the delightful exercise of this great privilege!

It is difficult to have the better of our Lord in the strife of liberality and love. Of all the fruits of the Holy Ghost, none seems more desirable, because none is less earthly or more heavenly, than joy; and it is just this fruit which our Blessed Lord bestows on such as devote themselves to intercession. There is a certain sunniness and light-heartedness about them for which there seems no ordinary cause, except that it is like the sweet lightening of the spirit which comes after a kind and unselfish action. This may partly be the reason, but there is another also. We see the fruit of our intercession; the spirit of prayer escapes out upon the earth, and it is everywhere like the hidden omnipresence of God. . . . And so, from the fruit being hidden, vain-glory attaches to it less than to almost any other devotion. . . .

Joy is the special recompense of intercession. It is part of his joy, who rejoices in the harvest of his Passion. What stirs in our hearts has come to us from his! It was first in his before it was in ours, and an angel's presence would be less desirable than is that little taste of the Redeemer's joy.

—*All for Jesus*

God's Honor

It is said of one of the first fathers of the Oratory, the companion of St. Philip, that he used to prefer those writers on grace

who made the most of God's sovereignty and least of man's free will. It is not so much an expression of his being a faithful disciple of St. Thomas in the particular theological question alluded to, as a disclosure of his peculiar spiritual life, and the bent of his devotion. He had got a habit of taking God's side in everything, and of always looking at things from God's point of view. . . . And this is exactly what I am venturing to recommend to you.

A false doctrine is odious, because it is untrue; it is odious because it gives scandal, or blackens devotion, or injures souls. But those who love God with a very tender and delicate love, do not think of it so much in these respects, as because God's honor is wounded by it. God's honor is their first thought. They range themselves at once on God's side. So again, a good man is overwhelmed by an unjust persecution or a cruel calumny. These men are not without the most tender sympathy and the most generous self-sacrifice for the sufferer. But their first thought, their strongest thought, their abiding thought is the wound inflicted on God's honor by the persecution of His servant, and the sin almost necessarily committed by the persecutors. So in cases of spiritual destitution, or public sins, or of local calamities, or of Catholic triumphs, or of getting souls out of purgatory, these men by an instantaneous instinct feel and find where God's glory is touched and are at once so absorbed in it that they often seem unaffectionate or ungenerous, or uncordial in sorrowing and rejoicing with others; but it is not really so in their hearts.

Now, this taking God's side on every occasion may easily be formed in us as a habit by time, prayer, and quiet assiduity in devotion; and surely it is a help to us in loving and serving God. It is a great thing gradually to grow in the conviction that there is no real sorrow in the world but sin; and that warfare with sin in others, as well as in ourselves, in prayer as well as in action, is just the one work we have to do, and is just the one work that is worth doing. And it is this conviction which comes of our always taking God's side, and when it has come causes us to persevere all the more steadfastly in taking that side. As crea-

tures, we are in our proper place when we are taking the side of our Creator, defending His interests, protecting His majesty, advancing His glory. There is happiness in the darkest lot, peace in the wildest trouble, when we are thus engaged.

But God is not our Creator only; He is our Father also. Oh! that we all felt the importance of this! The man who serves God as his Creator is a very different character from the man who serves Him as his Father. We do not serve God out of love because we have not a loving idea of God. We are dry, cold, grudging with Him because we will persist in looking at Him only as Lawgiver, or Master, or Sovereign, or Judge. Far more persons would try to go on to perfection, far more would persevere in it, there would be a far less wide gulf between saints and common Catholics, if only we were all agreed to serve God as our Father and to look upon Him as our Father. It is the very sunshine of life to believe and to feel at every turn that God is our Father and is acting to us out of a Father's love and in a Father's way!

See what pains God has been pleased to take to prevent an unkindly view of Him on the part of His children. He has committed all judgment to the Son. It is our dear Lord as man who is to judge us at the last. Our very last appeal is to His sacred human heart. When God invites His rebellious people to return to Him, by the mouth of Jeremias, He sums up all their sins and then pleads so compassionately, rather for Himself than with them. "Therefore, *at the least,* from this time call to me, Thou art my Father." The apostle sums up the whole work of the Gospel in this very thing, that we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father; and when our Lord teaches us to pray, it is by the name Father that He bids us call on God. Nay, He has provided one of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, that of Piety, for the express purpose of enabling us to exercise, even in an heroic degree, a really filial tenderness toward God. This gift is defined to be an habitual disposition which the Holy Ghost infuses into the soul to excite in us a filial affection

toward God, and Saint Thomas tells us that works done to God as our Father are more meritorious than works done to Him as our Creator because the motive is more excellent. . . .

Saint Paul, not content with the passage already quoted from the Epistle to the Romans, repeats almost the same words to the Galatians. He speaks as if, under the old dispensation, God had not, so to say, succeeded in persuading the Jews to look upon Him as their Father, and that, therefore, "when the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts saying Abba, Father. . . .

Lancisius, in his treatise on the Presence of God, gives four reasons in reply to an objector who asks: "Why, in interior acts of love, do you add the name of Father?" The reasons given are: first, because it is desirable that such acts of love should be elicited from the soul, not merely by the affections of humility and religion implied in the title of Lord, but by an affectionate filial feeling toward Him. Secondly, because of the greater merit thus acquired, according to the doctrine of Saint Thomas. "It is more excellent," says the angelic doctor, "to worship God as our Father, than to worship Him as our Creator and Lord." Thirdly, because the remembrance that God is our Father excites confidence in us; and it is on this account, say Tertullian, Saint Cyprian, and St. Chrysostom, that the Lord's prayer begins Our Father; for, to quote St. Thomas again, "confidence is chiefly excited in us by considering God's love toward us, whereby He wishes us good things, and on which account we call Him 'Father.' " Fourthly, "we call Him Father," says St. Augustine, "that by the kind name of Father we may win His favor, and by that appellation move Him to grant what we are asking." . . .

Now, if we fully feel that God is our Father, if our daily way of thinking of God, and of approaching Him, is as our most dear Father, it must soon come to pass that there will be nothing

on earth half so dear to us as His majesty and His honor. We should feel as if it belonged to us and was really our own, and we should take up any offense against it as warmly as we should now take up an injustice toward ourselves. But it is sin which offends Him; and therefore, it would be sin which we should feel to be our one enemy, our only care, our single misery on earth whether it were in ourselves or in others. Yes, other men's sins would cease to be matters of indifference to us, because they are offenses against the majesty of God.

When we are full of this view of God, not a day goes by without our detecting something fatherly in Him which we never observed before. Prayer changes, and sacraments accomplish greater things than heretofore. Everything about us alters by degrees. Duties grow into privileges; penances brighten up into pleasures; pains soften the heart with a delicious humility, and sorrows are heavenly presences. It is as if earth were making itself into heaven; and at the commonest sights and sounds something tingles in our hearts as if God were just on the point of speaking or appearing. What another thing is life when we have found out our Father. Earth's sunshine is heaven's radiance, and the stars of night as if the beginnings of the Beatific Vision.

When we love God, we rejoice that He is God, that He is so good and perfect as He is. We call this feeling the love of complacency. We transfer His joy to ourselves; we rejoice in it as if it were our own, simply because we love Him. But this is not the only office of love. If it makes us happy because the Object of our love is happy, by transferring His happiness into our hearts, and so making His interests our own, the same love will equally make us sorrowful, because the Object of our love is wronged or oppressed, by transferring His injury to ourselves, and placing His wrongs in our hearts as if they were rather ours than His. What I mean is this, that to sorrow over the sins of others is no far-fetched devotion, or subtle refinement of religious feeling; but that it follows inevitably upon the love of God. Where there is no such sorrow for sin, either in ourselves or others, there is

no love of God; and in proportion to the amount of love will the degree of this sorrow be. What was it that made our Lady's dolors more intolerable than the tortures of the martyrs, but that her love exceeded the martyrs' love? Thus, if God is wronged and outraged, we take the wrong into our hearts, and it wounds us by means of the love we have for Him.

As sympathy and compassion are feelings more easily excited in us than those of complacency, it seems as if God wished to cultivate what theologians call the love of condolence, even more than of complacency. This is one reason why devotion to the Passion is the great popular devotion of the whole Church. It may also be a reason why our Lord was pleased to suffer so much more than He need to have done, and with so many unnecessary touching circumstances, that to condole with Him in His Passion might be all the easier, and so He might have more of our love. Neither does it require any rare amount of love to feel this sacred compassion. The women of Jerusalem were no saints and yet they wept over Him in the way of the Cross. Job's friends were the meanest-hearted of men, yet even compassion mastered their pompous dryness and unamiable pedantry. What we want of all things is our hearts softening and sorrow softens them sooner and more effectually than joy.

I have no hope we shall get any further loves into our hearts if we do not first domesticate this love of condolence there. We do not find such great fault with a man who does not joy in another's joy, as we do with him who grieves not with another's grief. Sympathy belongs to our position in the world and there is hope for the most sinful heart, if it only keeps its quick and affectionate sympathies. Out of all evil comes good; and from sin and the Passion of our dear Lord, as from two perennial fountains, flows this blessed love of condolence in our hearts. And see what this love can do! Mary's compassion is said, in a certain sense, to have cooperated with our Blessed Lord's Passion in saving the world. How many instances we have on record of God showing mercy to sinners just because they kept up some

trifling tender memory of His loving Passion! We must grieve with Him now if we wish to rejoice with Him hereafter. I wish you would reflect on this. I do not think you keep it in mind as you ought or appreciate its value. Saint Francis of Sales says that the ardent desire of our Savior to enter our souls by this dolorous love is inexplicable. Here then is a sweet way of loving Him, a sweet way of giving Him greater glory. You will not refuse Him when it is so easy. I am sure you love Him. I am sure you wish to love Him more. Is there such a thing as a heart that does not love Him? But it is not our business now to go in search of such strange things, or to see if such dreadful wonders exist upon the earth. We love Him; blessed be His grace for that! There was His old Passion eighteen hundred years ago; there is His daily Passion now, and His nightly agony because sin abounds. But He shall take refuge with us. . . .

But, you may say, sorrowing for other men's sins is all very well for the saints; we know the saints have done so; but it is a thing rather to be admired than imitated; it is above us; it would be an injudicious practice in us; we do not half sorrow for our own sins yet; we must not go so fast; we must learn a little more of that first. Alas! do not make such an objection as this. Let me take you on your own ground. You have not, you say, half enough sorrow for your own sins. There is nothing you regret so much as this, nothing which seems to you more uncomfortable and unpromising in your spiritual life. But why have you not more sorrow? Because you look more at sin as it affects the interests of your own soul than as it affects the interests of God. I do not mean to say that you should not look at it in that way—God forbid. You must do the one, but you must not leave the other undone. Now, if you look at sin simply as it regards your own reward and punishment, it is clear you will never get an adequate hatred of sin; for your punishment is far from being the chief evil of sin. Its chief evil is its outrage of the majesty of God; and if you could see it in this light, you would have a much keener sorrow for your own sins. But then to see it in this light, you

must learn to look with an eye of sorrow on the sins of others, for there you have no interests of your own but you are contemplating simply the injured glory of our Heavenly Father. . . . When I use the word sorrow, you must not misunderstand me; I am not putting before you anything melancholy or disagreeable. Far from it. The sorrow I speak of is one of the greatest pleasures in life, enough to lighten a heavy heart, rather than to depress a light one. . . . Thus it has been that the saints who have received the most eminent gift of tears have also been inundated with spiritual joy. . . . In a revelation recorded in the life of Saint Catherine our Lord said: "the greater love is, the greater is the pain; so, as love grows, sorrow will also grow." Similar revelations are found in the lives of Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, Saint Gertrude, and others. . . . Indeed, this exercise of sorrow for the sins of others is the very office which nuns have to fill in the Church of God. There are none of them, no matter how they may be occupied with education or other external work, who have not this burden laid upon them by the mere fact of their religious profession. . . . If a good soul were to see all at once what it has pledged itself to in the way both of perfection and of suffering by religious profession, perhaps without a miracle it could not endure the vision and live. . . .

Still more remarkable is the proof of the power over the Sacred Heart of this practice of sorrowing for the sins of others. . . . He who forgetteth not the cup of cold water can still less forget these interior acts of loving sorrow and sorrowing love. What a treasure is here for us, if our love would only be wakeful and watch for the opportunities. . . .

Saint Lawrence Justinian, the patriarch of Venice, says: "He cannot help sorrowing for other people's sins who sorrows truly for his own. A healthy limb on the body that helps not the others when they are sick, occupies its place in vain. These members of the Church, likewise, who see their brethren's sin and do not weep over it, or compassionate the ruin of their souls, are useless members. Yet no one worthily deplores the sins of others who,

by voluntary falls neglects his own. We must at least cease to sin wilfully if we desire to mourn over the falls of others." . . .

Now, have we thought sufficiently of this? We live in a land where we see God offended every day and every hour. We see souls perishing for want of faith: we hear blasphemies on all sides. Does all this grieve us? Have we felt it as a personal calamity? Or have we shut ourselves up selfishly in our own hearts, thanking God with an unamiable gratitude that we, at least, have the true faith and the living sacraments, and looking on all the rest as a doomed multitude, who are no concern to us, one way or another? If you have no tie to the souls of all these, and indeed you have, for Christ shed His Precious Blood for them as well as for you, at least you have a tie to the glory of God; and can you feel that you really love God, in your own sense of the word love if you do not keenly feel His dishonor? But it is not to upbraid you that I write—God forbid! It is rather to explain to you and to urge upon you the practices that will cultivate that sweet spirit more and more. . . .

Saint Augustine says: "This is the persecution that all suffer who desire to live piously in Christ, according to the true and biting sentence of the apostle. For what persecutes the life of the good more sharply than the life of the wicked, not because it forces the good to imitate what displeases them, but because it compels them to grieve over the life they behold? For in the sight of a pious man, an evil liver, though he does not oblige him to consent to his sin, yet tortures him with the sight and sorrow of it." . . . Oh that there were such a heart in us that we could make these dispositions our own! Oh that we felt sin to be the one solitary evil of the world! Yet how soon these feelings come, if only we set ourselves to seek them, to ask them of God. What does He want but to be loved—loved always, loved everywhere; how then, if we ask this love of Him, can He refuse it to us? Why not turn all our prayers into one, and pray early and late for more love of God? But, you may say, in what ways are we to practice this sorrow for the sins of others?

We should strive in our meditations to see how God ought to be served and glorified by His creatures. We should put before ourselves His infinite perfections and attributes, His beauty and loveliness in Himself. We should picture to ourselves the perfect obedience with which His will is done in heaven, and try to unite ourselves with the interior dispositions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and all the hierarchies and choirs of angels. We should count up the benefits and blessings which in His infinite love He has bestowed upon His creatures, and especially in the four great wonders of mercy, Creation, the Incarnation, the Holy Eucharist, and the Beatific Vision. Then we shall see what sin really is, how terrible it is to offend so great a majesty, how base beyond words to wound so unutterable a love. We shall then hardly be able to leave the house and follow our worldly occupations without finding food for this sorrow over sin. At every step we shall be glad to make acts of reparation to the injured glory of God. The amount of the world's forgetfulness of God will strike us every day as more and more astonishing. This sort of common consent by which men ignore God, His rights, His claims, His interests, will seem to us more hideous than overt acts of sin. . . .

Another method of practicing this sorrow for sin is the one suggested by St. Bernard to Pope Eugenius: "Lift up the eyes of your reflection, and behold the nations. Are they not rather dry for the fire than white for the harvest? How much is there that looks like fruit which yet, on nearer inspection, is but briars! Nay, not even briars, but old and knotted trees, bearing only such mast and acorns as the swine can eat." Take the map of the world; look first at Asia, where our Lord was born and suffered. Look at Turkey, Persia, Tartary, China, Japan, and the vast continent of India; how few Christians are to be found in the whole extent! Fearful systems of idolatry, the foul creed of Mohammed, communities bearing the name of Christ, yet in truth denying it in heresy and schism—these exercise an almost unlimited sway over those beautiful regions, and only here and

there is one to be found who calls on the saving Name of Jesus, and worships His Precious Blood. Yet, there was man created, and Eden planted; there was the home of the chosen people; there the Son of God taught and suffered; there the apostles preached, and Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, and Chrysostom upheld the faith and trampled on heresy. As to Japan and China, their very soil is soaked with the blood of our dear Lord's martyrs. Yet, how scanty the harvest of His glory.

Look along the Mediterranean shores of Africa where once over four hundred bishops had their thrones, then into the vast regions of the Moors, the Hottentots, and Caffres! On how many leagues of country the sun shines where none call on Jesus or know of His blessed Cross. Look too how heresy has eaten into the fair fields of Europe! Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, England, are all more or less its prey, and multitudes are daily passing into perdition within the sound of the true Gospel and within reach of the holy sacraments! Oh what a field is there for acts of love! Think of the day when the compassionate Creator looked over His own beautiful creation and blessed it because it was all so good. Think of the day when, to bring back that primal benediction, nay, to give it a new and better benediction, Jesus hung upon the Cross on Calvary. And this is the result! This is the sinner's recompense to God! As our thoughts wander on and our eyes rest on the colored provinces of Mohammedans, heathens, and heretics, do we not feel drawn to offer to God all the acts of adoration which the angels have made this day in heaven, in reparation for the glory these poor outcasts have not given Him? Another while we resort to the merits of Jesus Himself, to the heroic virtues of His ever-blessed Mother, to the apostles, martyrs, virgins, doctors, confessors, that we may supply with loving intention the praise that should arise to the divine Majesty from all these tribes and nations.

Another practice is suggested by Father Balthazar Alvarez, Saint Teresa's confessor. It is to journey over the world in spirit, and visit the many churches and tabernacles where the Blessed

Sacrament is reserved, and so few come to visit the Love of our souls. "The streets," says he, "are full, but the churches are empty. Crowds are eagerly intent on their own interests, and so few come to commune with Jesus about His!" Saint Alphonso, also, with his usual thoughtful sweetness, suggests to us how many churches there are where Jesus is obliged to dwell in disorder, and neglect, and where, from week's end to week's end no one comes to visit Him. With what childlike acts of love, ever varying, yet ever tender, may we not pour out our hearts before Him in these deserted sanctuaries! How acceptable to Him is this little offering of heartfelt sorrow. He loves to be remembered and nothing is little in His sight which is done for the love of Him, for His love transmutes and magnifies it all.

I do not say that you should faint at the bare name of sin, as the saints have done; such things require special grace and great heights of love. But some little you can do in reparation and in sorrow for the sin of the world, and out of that little, be it ever so little, God will have great glory, and we shall comfort one another's hearts.

Yet, we must not forget to sorrow for our own sins also, and to sorrow for them chiefly as offenses against God so infinitely good and loving. "If we grieve and sorrow for our sins," says St. Chrysostom, "we lessen the magnitude of our sin; nay, oftentimes we do away with it altogether." And St. Basil says, "such weeping turns to joy at last." . . . But in this sorrow we must not be excessive; we must consider our sins more in general than in particular, and, above all, as was revealed to Saint Catherine, it should be a recollection of the Precious Blood, and a pondering of the Divine Mercy, rather than a dry study of our sins, according to the words of St. Bernard: "I advise you, my friends, occasionally to draw back from the annoying and anxious scrutiny of your ways and to go out upon the wider and serener paths of the divine benefits." . . .

Life is but a very little while compared with eternity; and

throughout eternity we shall be infinitely happy, and yet have but one occupation—to give glory to God. We shall have literally nothing else to do. And this single task will contain in itself such treasures of bliss that there will be nothing left that we can desire. Why not begin this work on earth? . . . A man who sees everything as sin or not sin, who seeks everywhere the secret glory of the hidden Creator, who follows unearthly standards, and uses unearthly weights and measures, who strives to do the commonest actions from supernatural motives, and who can love what he does not see, can hardly be possessed either by the spirit of worldliness or of self-love. His life is a protest against the world and against himself. Yet this is a description of what a man would soon become who took up this devotion. He who looks long and lovingly on God will soon cease to see any loveliness in himself; and thus this practice would deliver him from the two greatest enemies of the spiritual life.

We should also find that this devotion would give us great power with God. Answers to prayer would begin to come more thickly upon us than before. Our words would have a weight beyond themselves, or beyond our reasoning, our talents, or our eloquence. What is worth anything which God has not blessed? Spiritual power is the only real power and it follows different rules from other power. When Saint Vincent of Paul founded his Congregation of the Mission, Father Condren, the superior of the French Oratory, and one of the most spiritual men of his day, said to him, "Ah, my Father! I recognize that this is the work of God, and that the spirit of Jesus is upon it, and that it will succeed, for all the men are of low birth, and none of them of learning. This is the sort of weapon to which God gives power." See on what unworldly principles his judgment was based. St. Philip made out that all power was in detachment from the world; and the work of Saint Ignatius may be summed up in one word, that he proved this to the world—this very thing that detachment is its master. So, do you take up this devotion to

God's offended glory, and you will see by many a sensible proof that God is with you in other more abundant and more effectual ways than He has ever been before. . . .

What is it then for which I am pleading? Only for this: that you should not altogether cut yourselves off from the glory of God, as if it were no concern of yours, and that you and He were not in partnership! This is really all. God is going to give you His glory for your own in heaven for all eternity. Surely you cannot altogether disclaim connection with it now: surely its interests very much concern you; its success must be your success, and its failure your failure too. You cannot stand aloof from the cause of Jesus on earth, and even keep up a sort of armed neutrality with God, when you desire as soon as you die, without so much as tasting the sharpness of purgatory, to be locked in His closest embrace of unutterable love forevermore. Yet this is the plain English of the lives of most Catholics. Verily, we do not look like a people who have come to kindle a fire upon earth, nor to be pining because it is not kindled. Ah, Jesus, these are Thy worst wounds. I think lightly of the ruddy scars of Thy hands and feet, of the bruised knee and the galled shoulder, of the thousand-wounded head and the wide-open heart. But these wounds!—the wounds of coldness and neglect, and unpraying selfishness!—the wounds of the few that were once fervid and are now tepid, of the multitudes that were never fervent, and so cannot even claim the odious honors of tepidity!—the wounds wherewith Thou wert wounded in the house of Thy friends!—these are the wounds to be wiped with our tears, and softened with the oil of our affectionate compassion. Blessed Lord! I can hardly believe that Thou art what Thou art when I see Thy people wound Thee thus! and my own wretched heart! It too lets me into sad secrets about man's capability of coldness and his infinity of ingratitude. Alas! the concluding chapters of the four Gospels—they read like a bitter jest upon the faithful! And then we live as if we would petulantly say, "Well, we cannot help it. If Jesus chose to do and to be all this, it is His own affair; we only wanted absolution;

we only wanted a machine to be saved by—a locomotive into heaven—the cheapest and roughest that would do the work and land us at the terminus. You devout people in reality stand in the way of religion. It may be hard for us to define enthusiasm; but you surely are enthusiasts. What we mean is that you are all heart and no head. Mere heart will not do instead of talent. Earnestness is not theology. There are other things to be done in life besides going to Mass and to confession. How can we have confidence in people who let themselves be run away with by religious fervor? All this incarnation of a God, this romance of a Gospel, these unnecessary sufferings, this prodigal bloodshedding, this exuberance of humiliations, this service of love, this condolence of amorous sorrow; to say the truth, it is irksome to us; we are not at home in it at all; the thing might have been done otherwise; it was a matter of debtor and creditor; everyone is not a poet; everyone cannot take to the romantic. Really there must be a mistake in the matter. God is very good, and His love is very well in its way. Of course He loves us and of course we love Him. But really, by a little practical common sense, and a few wholesome reasonable precepts, and a strictly conscientious discharge of our relative duties, might we not put this tremendous mythology of Christian love, with all possible respect, a little to one side, and go to heaven by a plain, beaten, sober, moderate path, more accordant to our character as men and to our dignity as British subjects? If the 'Anglo-Saxon race really fell in Adam,' why obviously we must take the consequences. Still, let the mistake be repaired in that quiet orderly way and with that proper exhibition of sound sense so dear to Englishmen."

Well! if it must be so, I can only think of those bold words of Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzi: "O Jesus! Thou hast made a fool of Thyself through love."

O poor desolate glory of God! Thou art a foundling upon the earth! No one will claim thee or acknowledge kindred with thee, or give thee a home. Cold as the world is and pitiless the pelting of incessant sin, thou liest crying at our doors and men

heed thee not. Poor homeless glory! Earth was meant for thee once as much as heaven, but there have been robbers abroad, and it is no safe traveling for thee along our roads now. But there are some few of us still who have pledged ourselves to Heaven, that from this hour we will take thee to our own homes as John took Mary; "henceforth our substance is thy substance, and all we have is thine."

—All for Jesus

Unbelieving Materialism

Horrible to relate, aversion to God is far from being uncommon among His creatures. There are many bold and impenitent sinners who are devils before their time, to whom the name of God or His perfections are not so much terrible as they are odious. When they come in sight of His commandments, or of some manifestation of His sovereignty, or even some beautiful disclosure of His tenderness, they are like possessed persons. They are so exasperated as to forget themselves, until their passion hurries them on to transgress, not only the proprieties of language, but even the decorum of outward behavior. There seems to be something preternaturally irritating to them in the very mention of God, quite irrespective of the absolute dominion which He claims over them as their Creator. There are others whose habitual state of mind, when they approach religious subjects, is to be on their guard against God, as if there were some dangerous subtility in the greatness of His wisdom, or some artful overbearing tyranny in the condescensions of His majesty, or some dishonest concealed purpose in the invitations of His mercy. With these men the probabilities are against God. He is not likely to mean well. It is safest to distrust Him. Discretion must beware of Him. Moderation must not be excited by Him. We must not let Him throw us out of our wise sobriety. He has come to bargain with us, and we must be vigilant, or we do not know to what we may be induced to commit ourselves. With

such men their first thought of God is to dishonor Him; for how shall a son doubt his father without doing him dishonor?

There are others who are not by any means to be reckoned among the mass of men, and who serve Him truly with a holy fear, but who seem not to have escaped altogether the contagion of aversion to God. With them it shows itself in the shape of uneasiness, perplexity, and doubt. They entertain suspicions against the perfections of God's justice or the universality of His compassion. When they hear of certain things, jealousy of God starts up, as it were, unbidden in their hearts. It is not so much that they have definite intellectual difficulties in matters of faith. But they have not that instantaneous and unclouded certainty that all is right, and best, and exquisitely tender, where God is concerned, which is the pure sunshine and invigorating air of the atmosphere of faith. Nay, have we not all of us moods, in which an allusion to God makes us impatient; and is not this fact alone the nearest of any fact to a deep-sea sounding of our corruption?

It is hard to see what God has done to deserve all this. It seems most unkind, most cruelly disloyal to the immensity of His goodness, and to the unalterable bounty of His compassionate dominion. Truly, He is our King as well as our Father, our Master as well as our Friend. But are the relations incompatible? It is the very necessity of our case as creatures, that we must be under a law; and could we be under laws less numerous, less onerous, than those under which we are laid by the unchangeable perfections of God? Easy laws, few laws, and laws which it is our own interest to keep—these are the characteristics of the dominion of God. Why then are we restless and uneasy, and not rather happily lost in amazement at the goodness of our great Creator? It seems wonderful that He who is so great should also be so good; and it is the joyous lesson which the sands of life teach us, as they run yearly out, that His very greatness is the only blessed measure of His goodness.

But ignorance of God and aversion to God are not of themselves a sufficient description of the religious condition of the

great mass of men. There are multitudes also who are simply indifferent to God. It sounds incredible. The mere knowledge that there is a God should be enough to shape, control, revolutionize, and govern the whole world. And this, quite independent of the minute, infallible, and touching knowledge of Him which revelation gives us. But when that is added, surely it should be enough to strike indifference out of the list of possible things. Surely every human heart should be awake, and alert, to hear the sound of God's voice, or discern His footprints on the earth. Our Creator, our Last End, our Saviour, our Judge, upon whom we depend for everything, whose will is the only one important thing to us, whose Bosom is the one only possible home for us—and He to be regarded as simply the most uninteresting object in His own world! Is this really credible? Alas! we have only to look around and see. Does a day pass which does not prove it to us? Nay, very often, to our shame be it spoken, is it not a considerable exertion even to us to interest ourselves in God? And this indifference, can we be quite sure that it is less dishonorable to God than positive aversion?

These are melancholy results. Yet somehow they spur us on to try to do more for God ourselves, and to love Him with a purer and more disinterested love. Alas! if the saints are few in number, those who are either ignorant of God, or indifferent to Him, or have an aversion to Him, are countless multitudes. Many fair regions of this beautiful world are peopled by idolaters. The sacred places of scriptural Asia are tenanted by the followers of Mahomet. Heresy and schism usurp whole countries, which boast of the name of Christian; and, even in Catholic hands, it is depressing to think how many thousands there are, who must be classed with those who are not on the side of God. These are very practical considerations; for if there is the least honesty in our professions of loving God, they must greatly influence both the fervor of our devotion and the amount of our mortification. They bring home to us that suffering and expiatory character,

which, by a law of the Incarnation, belongs to all Christian holiness.

—*Creator and Creature*

A Seared Conscience

A seared conscience! This is a fearful possibility, and yet to use the apostle's expression, "the Spirit manifestly saith" that there is such a thing. It is according to St. Paul one of the marks of heresy. It belongs also peculiarly to worldliness. To have gone on for such a length of time doing wrong that we have at last ceased to advert to its being wrong, to sin and for the monitor within to be silent, to forget God and not to remember that we are forgetting Him—all this is surely far worse than to be a savage or an idolater. But this is to have a seared conscience. This is the tendency of worldliness, a tendency which can develop with incomparable swiftness. And then where is the power of coming right again? We have drifted away from all the sweet facilities of repentance. We have hardened ourselves against the ordinary impetus of grace. We have made ourselves so unlovely that grace would shun us if it could. We have sold ourselves to the devil, and he has got us safe before the proper time. With most men it is enough to say that if they erred, at least they had a good conscience about it, or that their conscience told them it was wrong, and they are sorry they gave way. But if we have a seared conscience, neither of these things avail. We have forgotten and pretermitted God: we did so contumeliously at first; but now our habitual contempt has superinduced oblivion: it seems as if He were going to retaliate, to pay us back in our own coin, and for the present at least to pretermit us. We no longer know when we are in danger. We have lost our chart. We can tell nothing of our latitude and longitude. No land is in sight: nothing but a waste of boundless waters. The sun is hidden and we can take no observations. The night is so grim and murky that not a star

will give us an indistinct notion where we are; and the needle is snapped, and we know neither north from south, nor east nor west. What are our chances of safety now? There has come upon us the fatal woe of Isaias: "Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

—*Creator and Creature*

True Devotion Means Reparation

A continual spirit of reparation must preside over all devotion, a reparation which is the immediate growth of familiarity, or rather, which is the loving familiarity itself, with its eye resting on the reverence out of which all our devotion springs. To the devout mind Jesus habitually presents Himself as one who has not got His rights. He is injured and wronged with every heightening circumstance of pathetic injustice. There is no time when love pours itself out from the deepest and purest fountains of the heart with more self-abandonment than when the object of our love has been wronged. The very thought is so pitiable that it creates new love, such as we have never felt before, and the spirit of self-sacrifice beats in it like a heart. It is no longer a mere private joy of our own, a luxury of sentiment, a romance of feeling, which, while it enveloped the object of our love, reflected also no little radiance back upon ourselves. Self is more at home in love than in any other of the affections. It is an humbling and unpoetic truth but, nevertheless, a truth. Now, the position of being wronged invests the object of our love with a kind of sanctity. Affection assumes something of the nature of worship, and then self can live there no longer, because worship is the only real incompatibility with self. Hence it is that the love of reparation is a pure, and unselfish, and disinterested love. But this is not all. Jesus not only presents Himself habitually to us as one who is suffering because He is defrauded of His rights

but also as one who is in some mysterious way dependent upon our compassion to console Him, and upon our reparation to make good His losses. This adds tenfold more tenderness to our love and self returns again, but only in the shape of sacrifice, of generosity, of work, of sorrow, of abandonment. The spirit of reparation is a beautiful spirit, a spirit of human beauty fit to wait on the Humanity of our dearest Lord. It is the true Mary's lap within our souls, in which the Blessed Sacrament should ever lie, the pure white corporal of our most disinterested love!

Such should be our devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, as taught us by our Mother ministering to the Body of Jesus on the top of Calvary. It should consist of reverence, tranquility, love, familiarity, and reparation, rising out of each other in this order, and connected with each other in the supernatural logic of a devotional spirit.

—*The Foot of the Cross*

The Spirit of the Gospel

The spirit of the Gospel is tenderness; and these three wants I have been examining, of devotion to our Lady, of devotion to the Sacred Humanity, and of filial feelings towards God, are at once effects of want of tenderness, and causes of the continued want. This is the great occult hindrance. With your chivalrous desire for perfection, your disgust with the world, and your appreciation of high things, you expect to be making progress, and are disappointed. I have already asked you to examine yourselves, and see whether you are not wanting in devotion to our Blessed Lady, to our dear Lord's Sacred Humanity, and to the ever-blessed Paternity of God. Now let me put it in another shape. The want of these three things means in reality the want of tenderness, though it means other things as well. But the absence of tenderness in religion is often of itself enough to stay man's growth in holiness. It is worth while, therefore, to say

something on this subject. A man may be in a certain sense religious; he may fear God, hate sin, be strictly conscientious, and honestly desire to save his soul. All these are most excellent things. But you cannot say that the saints were men of this sort. They had about them a sweetness, a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, an affectionateness, nay, I will dare to say, a poetry, which gave quite a different character to their devotion. They were living images of Jesus. This, in our far inferior measure and degree, we also must strive to be, if we would grow in holiness.

By tenderness is not meant a mere impressionableness, softheartedness, or a facility of tears. These are as often marks of cowardice, laziness, and a want of resolute will and earnestness. True tenderness begins in various ways. Its progress is marked by a sorrow for sin, without thinking of its punishment, by what I have elsewhere called a touchiness about the interests of Jesus, by childlike docility to our superiors and spiritual directors, by mortifying ourselves and not feeling it a yoke, by never thinking of stopping short at precepts without going on to counsels, and by a very faint, incipient, and as yet scarcely discernible appetite for humiliations. According as it is formed in our souls, all the characteristics of sanctity gather to it, and group themselves round it. For love is a greater safeguard against sin than fear, and tenderness renders our conversion to God more entire by making it more easy. It especially attracts Jesus, whose spirit it is, and who will not be outdone in His own peculiar sweetness. Without this tenderness there can be no growth, and while it renders the performance of duty more perfect, it instills into us the especially Christianlike instincts, such as love of suffering, silence under injustice, a thirst for humiliations, and the like. Moreover, it deepens sorrow for sin into a contrition which is worth more to the penitent soul than any gift that can be named. Look at the phenomena of the Incarnation, what were they? Helplessness, unnecessary and unobliged suffering, sacrifice, abasement, continual defeat, no assertion of rights, carelessness of success, and most pathetic wrongs. And what is our response

to all these things, but the temper which is expressed by that one word tenderness?

The Sacred Infancy teaches us tenderness; the Passion tenderness; the Blessed Sacrament tenderness; the Sacred Heart tenderness. But look at the common life of Jesus among men, and you will see more clearly what this tenderness is like. There is first the tenderness of our Lord's outward deportment. The narrative of Palm Sunday is an instance of it; also His way with His disciples, His way with sinners, and His way with those in affliction or grief who threw themselves in His road. He quenched not the smoking flax nor broke the bruised reed. This was a complete picture of Him. There was tenderness in His very looks, as when He looked on the rich young man and loved him; and St. Peter was converted by a look. His whole conversation was imbued with tenderness. The tone of His parables, the absence of terrors in His sermons, and the abyss of forgiveness which His teaching opens out, all exemplify this. He is no less tender in His answer to questions, as when He was accused of being possessed, and when He was struck on the Face. His very reprimands were steeped in tenderness; witness the woman taken in adultery, James and John, and the Samaritan, and Judas; nor was His zeal less tender, as was evidenced when He rebuked the brothers who would fain have called down fire from heaven upon the Samaritan villagers, and also by the sweet meekness of His divine indignation when He cleared the temple.

Now if our Lord is our model, and if His spirit be ours, it is plain that a Christianlike tenderness must make a deep impression upon our spiritual life; and indeed give it its principal tone and character. Without tenderness we can never have that spirit of generosity in which we saw that we must serve God. It is as necessary to our interior life, or our relation with God, as it is to our exterior life or relation with others, and there is one gift of the Holy Ghost, namely piety, whose special office it is to confer this tenderness.

—Growth in Holiness

A Secret Apostle of Jesus

To gain the whole world will be no profit to a man if he suffer detriment, any detriment to his immortal soul. Go and persuade people of this; show them what store they should set by grace, and how one grace brings another along with it, and how all things are merits, and how all merits turn to glories which are eternal. Ah! you will indeed forward our dear Lord's interests if you do this; you will forward them far more than you have any idea of. Only pray that men may have a truer esteem of grace and you will be a secret apostle of Jesus. All graces are in Him. He is the fountain and the fullness of them all; He longs to pour them out over dear souls, souls that He died for; and they will not let Him because they must esteem the graces they have in order to gain new ones. Go and help Jesus. Why should a single soul be lost for which He died? I say, why should one be lost? It is a horrible thing to think of a lost soul. And why should they be lost? There is Precious Blood to be had for the asking; and what it gives is grace. Saint Paul spent his whole life teaching people about grace, and praying for grace for them, and that they might use it rightly when they had it. When the Fountain of all grace is springing up like a living well of joy in the heart after Communion, ask Him to open all men's eyes to the beauty of His grace, and so you will cause His grace to multiply, and with the multiplication of grace, His interests to prosper; for thus stands the case with our dear Lord, that the more He gives away, the richer He becomes. Dear King of souls! how is it that we can think of anything but Him? To think that *we* should be allowed to take His interests in hand: it is amazing! . . .

It may seem strange that our Blessed Lord should make use of such poor and vile instruments as we are for so great a work; but it is the same Lord who called simple fishermen from mending their nets, to be his apostles, and to convert the world. True it is that we have sins enough of our own to look after, that we have imperfections enough to turn away the Heart of our heav-

enly Spouse from us, and that there is no place in the whole world that we know of where the interests of Jesus are in so much danger as they are in our own souls. Yet, even we must be apostles! We must be serving the souls of others, even while we have so much to do for our own. The Gospel is a law of love, and the Christian life is a life of prayer. As the apostle tells us, we must make intercession for all sorts of men. Indeed, we shall never prosper with the work in our own souls, if we do not strive to advance the interests of Jesus in the souls of others. . . .

But it is important to remember that the interests of Jesus do not follow the same rule as the interests of the world. If we were not to remember this, we should soon be disheartened at the little good we seem to be doing. The interests of Jesus are, for the most part, invisible interests. We must take the power of prayer on faith. We shall never know till the last day all the answers there have been to our prayers, nor how they have told upon the Church for hundreds and hundreds of years. Look, for example, at Saint Stephen's prayer, when he was stoned to death. It obtained the conversion of Saint Paul, who was holding the clothes of Stephen's murderers. Only think of all Saint Paul has done, and continues to do daily, and will go on doing till the end of the world; and all he does, Saint Stephen does also, for it is all Saint Stephen's prayer. So, perhaps, somebody asks the prayers of the Confraternity that obstacles to his vocation to the religious life or the ecclesiastical state may be removed and it is granted some Friday evening to our prayers. He becomes a priest; he saves hundreds of souls; these souls save others, some by becoming priests themselves, some by becoming nuns, some by becoming holy fathers and mothers in the world; and so the prayer goes on spreading and spreading, and may very likely be found actually at work in the dead of that night when all the earth will be awakened to see our Lord coming in the East. Thus you must not look too much to visible fruits and to public results. What the world calls misfortunes often turn out to be the good fortune of Jesus. . . . His interests do not follow the rules of the

world, but the rules of grace. We must measure them by different measures, and not use the measures of the world. Our measures, weights, and coinage must all be of the sanctuary. Jesus was never so triumphant as when He let Himself be nailed to the Cross; yet the silly world thought it had all its own way then, and had carried the day completely. It is important that you should bear this in mind. It is of faith that God always answers right prayers, and in a way and to a degree beyond our most enthusiastic expectations; but He does not yet let us see how. We must take it on faith. We are quite sure that in the long run we shall not be disappointed.

—*All for Jesus*

3.

Our Mediators

The Blessed Trinity

There is not a movement in the whole Church, not a doctrine, or a rite, or a ceremonial, or an exercise of jurisdiction, not an energy of power and of benevolence, but, rightly interpreted, is an act of worship of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity. There is not a church opened, a Sacrament administered, or received, a Sacrifice offered, or a devotion practiced, the honor and the glory of which does not reach to the Holy Trinity, and rest there, and in the highest sense rest only there. There is not a day that rises on the earth, feast or ferial, that is not throughout the universal Church a celebration and commemoration of the Holy Trinity. So it is this very day; what strength in the thought, what consolation in the idea! so it is this very day. The pope in his palace, the episcopate in thousands of cathedrals, the monks and nuns in unnumbered cloisters, the faithful in their parishes, all that are doing good at all are doing this good—confessing, praising, fearing, loving, adoring the Undivided Trinity. Old conse-

crated Asia, wise, enlightened, royal Europe, the giant regions of exuberant America, the sandy shores and streamless deserts of mysterious Africa, the young fresh strength of distant Australia, all are sending up to heaven one only voice, not prayer exactly nor praise, but the cry of childlike wonder, *O beata Trinitas!* See! while we are looking up into the face of this resplendent mystery, we sink and sink in the depths of our own vileness. It seems too much that we are to see God, incredibly too much that we are to possess Him. Is it not an infinite blessing that He does not simply pass us over and ignore us? Sometimes in the stillness of the night, in the hush of prayer, when the soul is suspended it knows not how or in what place, it may so seem as if we might come to die, and He forget us, miss us and take no note of our disappearance; and in the horror of that awful imagination how sweet the undoubting knowledge of that eternal truth, that we are encompassed, girded up, wound round, and clasped to Him, with His everlasting Presence, His universal knowledge, His illimitable Power! *Sancta Trinitas, Unus Deus, miserere nobis!*

—The Blessed Sacrament

Love of Mary

Do we think sufficiently of this—that devotion to our Blessed Lady is not a thing which, like the possession of a book or a rosary, we have once for all, final and complete? It would be no less untrue to say that when we have received from God the grace of humility, we have simply to hold fast what we have got, and never dream of getting more, than to say that devotion to Mary was an ungrowing thing. I repeat, it must grow like a virtue, and strengthen like a habit, or it is worth nothing at all. Nay, it is worse than worth nothing, as a little thought will show you. Love of Mary is but another form, and a divinely appointed one, of love of Jesus: and, therefore, if love of Him must grow,

so also must love of her. If a person were to say, "you must not mingle prayer to Mary with prayer to Jesus," he would show that he had no true idea of this devotion, and that he was already on the brink of a very dangerous error. Yet people sometimes thoughtlessly speak as if devotion to the Mother was a little trifle allowably cut off from devotion to the Son, that it was something surrendered by Jesus to Mary: that Jesus was one thing, and Mary another, and that devotion to the two was to be divided between them proportionably to their respective dignities, say a pound to Him, and an ounce to her. If such persons really saw what they mean, which they do not, they would perceive that they were talking impiety. Love of Mary is an intrinsic part of the love of Jesus, and to imagine that the interests of the two can be opposed, is to show that we do not understand Jesus, or the devotion due to Him. If devotion to Mary is not already, and in itself, devotion to Jesus, then when we show devotion to her we are consciously subtracting something from Him, and so actually robbing God, which is sacrilege. So that when people tell us to keep within bounds, to moderate our devotion, and not to go too far, or to do too much for Mary, they are not, as they fancy, securing to Jesus His rightful honor, but they are then making the terrible confession that they themselves do take something from Jesus to give it to Mary, though they are careful it should not be very much. How dreadful this sounds, when put in plain words! Devotion to Mary can get wrong *in kind;* it can never err *in degree.* If love of Mary be not love of Jesus, if devotion to Mary be not one of His own appointed devotions to Himself, aye, and the chief one too, then my theology as well as my love tells me I can have no room for Mary at all, for my heart cannot adequately hold Jesus as it is. Dearest Mother! how little I should know of you, if I could think of you so dishonorably! And what a poor, low notion should I have of God Himself! I might as well think grace kept me from God, or sacraments enabled me to do without Jesus, as imagine that you did

aught else but gloriously magnify His love of me, and wonderfully intensify my love of Him!

—*All for Jesus*

The Angels

The beautiful life of the Angels, God's eldest-born, may also furnish us with most ample materials for intercession. Our Lord seems to call our attention to it when He bids us pray, "Thy will be done as it is in heaven." Scripture teaches us a great deal about the angels, their worship of God, their ministries toward other creatures, their individual characters, as in the case of Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, their multitude, and their nine choirs by name. Some theologians have taught that each angel is a species of himself, which would indeed open out quite an overwhelming view of the magnificence of God. Others, with more show of reason, make twenty-seven species, three in each choir, as there are three choirs in each hierarchy; and even this gives us amazing ideas of the court of heaven, when we remember how hard it is for us to conceive of any further specific division of reasonable creatures than those with bodies, and those purely spiritual.

Others, without entering into the question of species, tell us that the grace of each angel is something quite different in beauty and excellence from the grace of his fellows. If we follow out this thought also, it will be a joy to us to think of all the perfection of sweet worship which God is receiving in heaven while we are serving Him so meanly on earth. Thus Sister Minima of Gesu Nazzareno, a Carmelite nun of Vetralla, who lived at the time of the French invasion of Italy, and spent a life of wonderful and incessant intercession, used continually to offer to the divine majesty the love of the first choir of Seraphim in reparation for all the outrages then going on in the world. So also we are supplied with fresh materials for intercession by the various magnificence of worship which the different orders of saints are, at

this hour, and at every hour, offering to God in heaven, a worship and a glory which is increasing constantly as fresh souls from earth or purgatory attain to bliss. And in all this we satisfy our love, while we are with gentle efficacy influencing the Sacred Heart to grant our prayers.

—All for Jesus

Praise and Gratitude

The Blessed Sacrament is no less than heaven on earth. See how we meet its wonders at every turn, and are continually coming upon some of its blissful functions. God has thrown Himself, His grace, His joy, His presence into it as the last citadel of His love. Let us build our tents beneath its walls, and abide there evermore: for those portals are the happy end of all human pilgrimage. O thou waste land of endless torment and malediction! One sunbeam of God's beautiful presence falling athwart the outer darkness of thine everlasting curse, and it would be lit up into a home of joy and a paradise of peace. O Hidden Presence! Uncreated Beauty! Show Thyself now in this Thy sweetest sacramental hiding-place, show Thyself ever so little to our poor unworthy hearts, and we shall leap forward with longing love and unite ourselves eternally with Thee!

If such be the ways of God, what wonder His glory should rest in such a special manner on the Blessed Sacrament, what wonder it should be itself an endless fountain of fresh glory to His heavenly majesty? Everything that ever was, is, or will be, is only for the glory of God. This is the true simple philosophy of all creation, the one infallible truth of all possible sciences. What is heaven but a pageant of His love, and hell but the chastity of His justice? What is purgatory but the condescension of His patient mercy? How many things are there, kingdoms in the world of nature, and of grace, which seem to exist only for His glory? Such are the inimitable wonders of the saints, and the waste of beauty in the physical creation: such the mystery

of suffering on earth, especially in babes and idiots, such the whole notion of probation, whether of angels or of men, such the public pomp of the universal judgment of those whose dooms are already fixed and their eternal careers begun: such the excessive prerogatives of Mary, and such the sweet human abysses of the Sacred Heart, enclosed as many a time it has been within our own worthless hearts in the mystery of Communion. One half hour of one tabernacle's Sacramental life is more than the worship of all angels and saints for ever; for it is Jesus the living God. The various acts of worship of the various angelic choirs, the various hearts and souls of saints, glorified and grace-sublimed, straining through countless ages their intelligence and love, could not worship God as the new Host has worshipped Him before yet the priest has raised It for the worship of the faithful. Indeed, the worship He receives from the Blessed Sacrament is the only worship worthy of God in the whole of creation; and it is worthy of Him because it is, so far as worship can be, co-equal and co-extensive with Him. It is a joy to think of it, a delight to fathom it, if only to know afresh what all along we knew, that it was unfathomable. The Blessed Sacrament is sweeter far than sin is hateful; and thus is ever making to the offended Majesty of God a continual, divine, human, and abounding reparation.

Meanwhile, it not only glorifies God of itself, but it is leading, teaching, and enabling us to glorify Him also, imperfectly, yet still so as we could never else have glorified Him. The Blessed Sacrament is to us the doctor of the unity of God. It teaches us His unity in Himself, His unity in Trinity. It illuminates for us the unity of all His works and ways. It manifests Him to us consistently, miraculously, as one and the same at work in matter and spirit, in nature and in grace. And if we have read the Old Testament aright, surely we may confess that above all things the Most High God glories in His unity. Further, the Blessed Sacrament is continually drawing creatures to love God more and more. There is not a function of the Blessed Sacrament, Mass,

communion, the visit, exposition, procession, benediction, viaticum, the holy sepulchre, but they are each and all powers, attractions, forces, of Divine Love, the varieties of which are a science by themselves. Nay, to bring God and man still more closely together, see! the Flesh of Jesus has drawn not only His Divine Person into a miraculous mystic state, but also the Father and the Holy Ghost by real and true concomitance. What celestial attraction! So that of God, as well as of angels and of men, are those great words true, that where the Body is, there will the eagles be gathered together! O Littleness of my Sacramental Lord! What an ocean art Thou of Glory unto God! The feeblest accidents that matter could support, and yet the new residence of the Undivided Trinity, the extremes brought together, and at my priestly word; how plainly must the faith that holds this be a gift divine, how clearly must the love that conceived it be at once all-mighty and all-wise.

Yes! it comes to this—that God vouchsafing to dwell in the Blessed Sacrament, it must needs be His greatest work of love. O what was Palestine to this! He dwells there as our Father among His children, as our Redeemer to complete His work, as our Sanctifier to continue it, as our Glorifier impatiently anticipating our endless union with Him, and as our Creator, perfecting, finishing, and outstripping in Transubstantiation the most delicate processes of Creation, which without it would be unfinished. Look bravely now into the first dawn, the pearly aurora of Creation. We who have dared to look upon the Vision of the Holy Trinity, may be bold to look at this. See! out of viewless and impalpable Nothing that first instantaneous intellectual Creation, angels streaming forth in endless processions of diversified intelligence; and then those material orbs, in countless kinds, some strewn like gold-dust over sidereal space in fair white galaxies, some hung like clearly swinging lamps along the streets and squares of the vast ethereal city! He who made them all, and could mutiply the work again and again unnumbered times, He, the music of whose speechless voice evoked this splen-

dor and this beauty and this intelligence, who brooded on the deeps of Chaos, who planted Eden, who fashioned Adam, and who in that day was young yet everlasting, is the same, His whole undivided, ever-blessed Self who is now in the tabernacle, taken captive by His own insatiable love of the creatures whom His mercy made!

—The Blessed Sacrament

The Compassion of Mary

From the Compassion of Mary being contemporaneous with the Passion and indeed an integral part of it, there flowed into it the character of sacrifice and expiation which belonged to the Passion, and this is a degree and after a kind which does not belong to the sorrows of the saints. As the Passion was the sacrifice which Christ made upon the Cross, so the Compassion was the sacrifice of Mary beneath the Cross. It was her offering to the Eternal Father. It was an offering made by a sinless creature for the sins of her fellow-creatures. Their gain was her loss. The lightening of their hearts was the burdening of hers. Her darkness was their light. Their peace was her agony. Her Son was their victim. Their life was her tremendous martyrdom. Her offering rose to heaven together with the offering of Jesus. They were as two grains of incense on the burning coals of one thurible. With various fragrance they rose up to the throne in the same thin circles of blue smoke, perceptibly different, yet utterly inseparable. When the sound of the scourging went up to heaven, the smothered sighs of Mary's bursting heart went up with it. When the "Barabbas" of the multitude rang fiercely in the low vaulted sky, the agony of Mary went floating up, sweet music 'mid the fierce clamor, to the Father's ear. With the full knockings of the hammer, the beatings of her heart went up and lay down at the foot of the throne, and did not pass unheeded. Her voiceless aspirations flew upward in equal flight with the seven words which Jesus uttered on the Cross. His loud cry was heard

twice in heaven, the second time as it echoed thither out of Mary's heart. Thus, during those hours of the Passion, each oblation was a double one; the offering of Jesus and the offering of Mary was tied in one. They kept pace together; they were made of the same materials; they were perfumed with kindred fragrance; they were lighted with the same fire; they were offered with kindred dispositions. Thus, there is a sacrificial and expiatory character in Mary's Compassion which is peculiar to itself. The world was redeemed by the Passion of our Lord. But there never was, in the ordinance of God, such a thing as a Passion of Jesus disjoined from the Compassion of Mary. The two things were one simultaneous oblation, interwoven each moment through the thickly-crowded mysteries of that dread time, unto the Eternal Father, out of two sinless Hearts, that were the Hearts of Son and Mother, for the sins of a guilty world which fell on them contrary to their merits, but according to their own free will. Never was any sanctified sorrow of creatures so confused and commingled with the world-redeeming sorrow of Jesus as was the compassion of His Mother.

Furthermore, the Compassion of Mary was an example to the whole Church. It is part of the teaching of the four Gospels. It performs a function for all ages of the world. It is a continual source of holiness in the midst of each generation of the faithful. It is a living grace diffusing power among the children of God. It actually leads multitudes of souls to Jesus. It breaks the bonds of sin and evil habits. It melts cold hearts and stimulates the lukewarm affections of the torpid and the worldly. It pours light and tenderness, and a spirit of prayer, and a love of suffering, and a thirst for penance, into countless souls, between the sunrise and sunset of each day, and in the whole breadth of the world from pole to pole. It models saints; it animates religious orders; it is the type of a special spiritual life to individual souls. It rises up to heaven like an endless angelic song. Everywhere in the Church there is a sound of it. Out of seven deep places it echoes everlastingly. Time and space

have nothing to do with it. Simeon still prophesies, and we hear it, and a lifelong sadness runs thenceforth alongside of our perseverance in the ways of grace. Still Mary flies with Jesus into Egypt, and dwells there, and the Nile lapses by, and the shadows in our souls are substances of grace. Still for three days does the childless Mother wander with darkened spirit, seeking for her Child, and finding Him, at last, in the temple. Still is she meeting Him again and again with the heavy Cross upon His shoulders, and we the while meeting Him in her. Still is she at the foot of the Cross, alluring all her children to her. Still is she at the deposition from the Cross, and at the burial, acting over again and again those pathetic mysteries in the new hearts which the children of each generation give her. Thus, her Compassion is not merely her own. It authoritatively and authentically represented the whole Church on Calvary. She was present at the Passion, as it were, officially, and in a double capacity, as co-operating with the Redeemer, and as representing the redeemed.

The Compassion of our Lady may also be regarded in a twofold point of view, according as we consider our Lord as God or as Man. As God, His Divine Nature was fearfully outraged by the Passion. Not all the sins of the world put together so dreadfully and sacrilegiously violated the glory of God as that particular sin out of which He worked the redemption of the world. Never did the disloyalty of a rebellious creation make so deep an impression upon the Divine Honor, or seem so inexpressibly to endanger the sovereignty of God. This is a view of the Passion which we must never lose sight of. It needed another Passion to expiate itself. It needed a second Passion to make reparation to God for the first. Mary's Compassion occupies this place. The sin produced a double Passion, one in Jesus and one in Mary; but it produced it without double sin, so that her Compassion needed no expiation, though, had it done so, there was expiation enough in the Passion to satisfy for itself and for her

Compassion. But she stood at the foot of the Cross as the minister of God's glory. Her sorrows, even while they are fresh sorrows to Him, were also the nearest approach to a perfect reparation which creatures could make. Reparation is an essential element to all holiness. Now, if the collective sanctity of all the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins through all time had dedicated itself on earth until the day of judgment to the sole work of making reparation for His Passion—and rightly considered, the whole action of the Church is, in effect, reparation for the Passion—it could not by the end of the world have produced a reparation anything like so complete as the Compassion of Mary. It exceeded in efficacious holiness all other reparation. It was offered to our Lord's Divine Nature instantaneously, indeed simultaneously with the outrage, and almost coextensively with its excess. It came from His own Mother, which added to it an incomparable acceptableness. It fitted His Passion in kind, fashion, method, and degree as nothing else could fit it. Lastly, it drew its efficacy not merely or so much from its own intrinsic worth as from its real and vital union with the Passion. Mary's Compassion was the reparation she made to her Son as God.

If Mary at the foot of the Cross was the minister of our Lord's glory as God, she was no less the minister of His Sacred Humanity. In a merely human point of view we might be surprised at Mary's presence on Calvary. It was not the fitting place for a mother, the scaffold of her Son; and her Son we might have expected would have spared her the agony. But she was the minister of the Incarnation. She was His sole human parent. She represented in herself the human obedience under which the Incarnate Word had lived, and which was, as the Apostle has remarked, to characterize His death as perfectly as it had modeled His life. He had waited for her consent before He took flesh of her. . . . Mary's maternity was her Compassion at Bethlehem; Mary's Compassion was her maternity at Calvary.

—*The Foot of the Cross*

The Sixth Dolor

We have already seen how allusions to the Blessed Sacrament flit before us continually in this dolor. From Mary's demeanor we may now gather what our own devotion to that dread mystery ought to be. For the sixth dolor is, as it were, perpetuated in the Church until the end of time. As our Blessed Lord is daily offered in the Mass, and the selfsame sacrifice of Calvary continued and renewed without intermission day and night around the world, so are Mary's ministries to His mute and yet adorable Body going on unceasingly upon thousands of Christian altars and by the hands of thousands of Christian priests. Yet, as is ever the case with those things which we have from Jesus and Mary, what was intense bitterness to her, to us is exultation, privilege, and love. When she had gently laid aside the crown and nails, as precious relics, with what profound reverence did she kneel to receive the Body of her Son! It was not the attitude of a mother toward a son, but rather of the creature toward the Creator. She adored it with divine worship. She held it in her arms until the rest had adored it also. Her rights as a Mother were merged in her service as a creature. Yet the Blessed Sacrament is the living Jesus, Soul as well as Body, Godhead as well as Humanity. Worshipful as was His dead Body, because of its unbroken union with the Person of the Eternal Word, the Blessed Sacrament, if it were possible, demands of us worship more full and dread, more self-abasing and profound. We have no mother's rights. We are not, like Joseph of Arimathea, doing Jesus a service by ministering to His Body. The obligation is all on our side. He has come down again from heaven to us. We are not going up to the Cross to take Him down. With what immense reverence, then, ought we not to worship this divine Sacrament! Our preparation for Communion should be full of the grand spirit of adoration. Our act of receiving should be a silent act of holy eager fear and breathless worship. In our thanksgiving we ought to be lost in the grandeurs of His con-

descension, and not too soon begin to ask for graces, until we have prostrated ourselves before that living Incarnate God who at that moment has so wonderfully enshrined Himself within us. We should behave at Mass as, with all our present faith and knowledge, we should have behaved on Calvary. At Benediction, and when praying before the tabernacle, the Blessed Sacrament should breed in us continually a spirit of unresting adoration, unresting as that incessant cry which the astonished Seraphim and the Cherubim are continually uttering at the sight of the unimaginable holiness of God.

To this reverence we must add tranquility, or rather, out of this reverence will come tranquility. The spirit of worship is a spirit of quietness. We must not disquiet ourselves in order to deepen our reverence. We must not disturb ourselves by making efforts. We must gently submit ourselves to be overruled, constrained, and gradually calmed by the present majesty of God. Neither must we look into our own souls to see if we are worshipping, nor make any other reflex acts upon the processes which are going on within us. Under the pretense of keeping up our attention, all this is but so much occupation with self, and so much distraction from the presence of Jesus. Hence it is that so many Communions bring forth so little fruit. It is from the want of quietness. An unprepared Communion can hardly ever be a quiet one. The very object of the preparation is to clear our hearts of the worldly images which possess them, and which, if not expelled beforehand, will become importunate distractions at the very moment when adoration should rule within us tranquil and alone. Hence also it is that the best preparation for the Blessed Sacrament consists by no means in endeavoring to stimulate our affections by devout considerations, in order to warm our cold hearts and raise our fervor to a proper pitch. In truth, it is not in our power to do so. For the ardor, or the seeming ardor which we produce, is unnatural because it is violent and so it is not only short-lived, but it is followed by a reaction proportioned to the efforts we have made. A feeble fire is extin-

guished by the bellows, and even where it is blown up into a noisy crackling flame, it burns black and dull for long afterward, when the artificial blast has ceased to play. The best preparation is that which is rather of a negative character, and which consists of emptying ourselves of self, so far as may be—in banishing distractions, in realizing our own needs and poverty and nothingness and malice, and so coming to Jesus in the same temper that the humble sufferers came to Him in the Gospel to be healed of their diseases. Whatsoever is empty and unoccupied in our hearts He will fill when He enters there. Hence, the more room there is for Him, the more grace will there be for us. A quiet Communion with but little sensible fervor is a far deeper thing than a Communion which thrills through us with a pleasant agitation of great thoughts. Tranquility is thrilling also, but it is so in a higher and more supernatural way. The preparation of peace is the best adornment of the heart in which we are to hide the Blessed Sacrament; for the presence of Jesus is itself peace and works greater things where it finds peace already and has not to lose time by making room for itself and expelling intrusive images.

It is out of peace that love will come, such burning yet such humble love as becomes the worship of the Blessed Sacrament. Our reverence cannot have been right at first if love does not follow. When fear and shrinking and avoidance come to souls with regard to the Blessed Sacrament, it is not so much the want of love to which we must look as the want of reverence. Reverence infallibly provides for love. But the love of the Blessed Sacrament must be the growth of inward peace and spiritual tranquility. Very often we love less than we should love if we made less effort to love. Our faith tells us such overwhelming things of this divine mystery, that it seems a shame, almost a sin that we are not burning with sensible love all the day long. Jesus Himself is so near, so accessible, so intimately uniting Himself to us, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Calvary actually here, and we so cold, so moderate, so commonplace! Surely, we ought to be burnt up with the fires of the Seraphim. It is true. Yet, for all that we

cannot force ourselves. It is better to turn our vexation into self-hatred and self-contempt than to try to create an interior vehemence, which, after all, is a different thing from divine love. The love of the Blessed Sacrament is daily and lifelong. Surely it is not likely that such a love should be always, or even most often sensible. Do we go to Mass on week-days at our own inconvenience? Are we punctual and reverential in our daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament? Do we hear Mass with devout attention? Are our preparations for Communion and our thanksgivings after it among those actions which we practically confess to rank as the most important of our lives? Do we give up exercise, pleasure, visiting, study, and the like, or at least interrupt them, to go to Benediction when it is in our power? These are better proofs of an acceptable love of the Blessed Sacrament than the warmest transports or the most glowing heat in our hearts.

—*The Foot of the Cross*

Mary's Tranquility

We must not omit to enumerate Mary's tranquility among the heroic dispositions in which she endured her sixth dolor. It is by far the most wonderful thing about the interior life of her soul, so far at least as we are allowed to see into it. There seems to be no height of holiness which may not be predicated of such a marvelous tranquility. It is a token, not so much of a process of sanctification still going on, as of the deification of a human soul completed. It comes nearest of all graces to the denial of created imperfections. Inequality, surprise, mutability, inconsistency, hesitation, doubt, failure, vacillation, astonishment—these are all what might be called in geological language the *faults* in created sanctity. They are the imprints which human infirmity has left upon the work before it was set and hardened. They are the marks of catastrophe, which is itself a mark of feebleness. From all these, so far as we can see, our Lady's incomparable

tranquility preserved her. To her there seems to have been communicated some portion of that peace of God which Scripture says "surpasseth all understanding," and whose special office toward ourselves is "to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." No one thing explains so much of our Blessed Lady's grandeur as this heavenly calm. Apparent exaggerations find their place, their meaning, and their connection, when they are viewed in the light of this tranquility. Graces, which sound impossible when stated by themselves, settle down in this tranquility, disclosed distinctly by its light, and at the same time softened and made natural by its beauty. The Heart of Jesus alone can read the riddle of Mary aright; but this dovelike peace, this almost divinely pacific spirit is the nearest reading of the riddle of her immense holiness to which we can attain. It is as if God had clothed her with His attribute of mercy for our sakes and with His attribute of peace for her Son.

—*The Foot of the Cross*

Saint Joseph

There are flowers that give out their perfume in the shade, and grow more sweet as the sun mounts higher in the sky. They lie hidden under cool beds of rank green herbage, beneath the shadow of mighty trees; and yet when the warm air of the noon has heated the unsunny forest, these blossoms fill the foliaged aisles with their prevailing incense. Their odor gives a poetry and a character to the woodland scene, and by that odor the spot lives in our memory afterward. Such is the sweet fragrance of St. Joseph in the Church, stealing upon us unawares, perpetually increasing, and especially filling with itself all the shades of Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Egypt, but not reaching to the bare exposed heights of Calvary. Throughout the sacred infancy, St. Joseph is the odorous undergrowth of all its mysteries. We cause the perfume of his blossoms to rise up as we stir among them; and while we seem to be heeding it but little, because the Mother

and the Child are so visible and beautiful, nevertheless we should miss it, and stay our steps, and wonder, if it were to cease. Who can doubt but that His dear and chosen foster-father was another of our Lord's occupations in Mary's bosom? Of all sanctities in the Church, St. Joseph's is that which lies deepest down and is the hardest to see distinctly. We feel how immense it must have been. The honor of Jesus, and the office of St. Joseph toward His Mother and Himself, all point to an unusual effusion of grace upon him, while the lights, which transpire as it were through chinks in the Gospel, indicate a most divine, and at the same time a most deeply hidden life. At times we seem to see renewed in him the character of one of the old patriarchs, especially Abraham when in his simple tent-life amidst the pastoral solitudes of Mesopotamia; or we are reminded of the first Joseph, like the second Joseph by contrast, on the margin of the Nile. Then again there are glimpses which betoken the fashion of the New Testament sanctity, which make us hesitate in taking the view, in many respects so fitting, that in him the Old Testament holiness reached its highest and most beautiful development, and so touched Jesus, and abode in the circle of the Incarnation as representing that more ancient sanctity. At any rate, most marvelously must our Lord have enveloped St. Joseph with light and love, and wrought diligently in his soul with operations of the most astonishing and consummate grace. If magnificence is the inseparable accompaniment of all the divine perfections, there are none which it accompanies in a more special, though at the same time a hidden, manner than the attribute of justice; and it was peculiarly from God's justice that the exuberance of St. Joseph's graces proceeded. Who does not know the beautiful munificence of gratitude even among the sons of men? What then must gratitude be like in God? The sanctification of St. Joseph, the eminence of his interior beauty, must represent it. Our Lord as it were put Himself under obligations to St. Joseph, as well as in subordination to him. His fair and spotless soul was the cloister built round Mary's innocence. In his paternal foster-

ing arms the Child was laid, who had no father but the Eternal. On Mary's score, and on His own, how much had Jesus condescended to owe to Joseph? His payment was in holiness. When therefore we think of the offices for which he was paid, and who it was that paid him, must we not confess that Joseph also was a world by himself in the vast resplendent creation of grace, whose beautiful light and fair shining in its huge orbit we perceive with exultation, while it is hidden from us in its details by the immensity of its distance, and also by the strangeness of its phenomena, which will not altogether keep to our more limited analogies? On him truly the Word in Mary's bosom spent much labor, with jubilee of love, and exultation in the glorious perfection and variety of his loving work.

—Bethlehem

Mary Our Model in Grief

Grief may be either the solid foundation on which a vast supernatural edifice of sanctity is to be raised or it may be the very thinnest and most diluted of all human affections, a more clumsy ingenuity of selfishness, the most self-seeking of all the kinds of love; for there can be little doubt that sorrow is a kind of love. Thus the very highest and at the same time the very lowest things may be predicted of grief. The reason of the difference is to be found in the way in which we bear it. Grief is a difficult thing to manage. There is no time when our correspondence to grace requires to be more active, more vigilant, or more self-denying than in seasons of affliction. If we once begin to indulge our grief, a great work of God is frustrated. Everything which happens in the world happens with reference to our soul. But sorrow is the tool with which God finishes the statue and animates it with its beautiful expression. It is sad for us when we take it into our own hands. If God condescends to resume His work, and succeed us when we have done, He must disfigure us with suffering again before we shall be once more in a condition

for Him to commence His gracious work anew. Now, we have all of us a great temptation—and the more tender-hearted we are the greater our temptation—to indulge in grief as if it were a luxury. To endure, to hold fast by God, to do our duty, to supernaturalize our adversity, to carry our cross, to aspire heavenwards—all these things are fatiguing. They give us the sensation of toiling up a steep. We have all the weariness of an ascent without the satisfaction of any visible elevation; for we seem to make no way at all. Whereas to indulge our grief, to give way unreservedly to the ready inundation of comfortable tears, to complain—especially if we bring in a vein of religion, like a vein of poetry, into our complaining—these things bring with them the relieving sensation of going down hill. Of a truth it is the most earthward process through which a heart can well go. Thus, a tender-hearted man ought to be as much on his guard against sorrow as an intemperate man should be against wine. There is a fascination in it which may easily become his ruin. What makes the temptation more dangerous is that the world applauds the indulgence as if it were a moral loveliness, and looks shy at the restraint, as if it were hardness and insensibility; and to be suspected of coldness and indifference is almost more than a tender-hearted man can bear. There is no need to do physical violence to ourselves to hinder tears. The effort will make us ill, without bringing any profit either to body or soul. God does not dislike to see His creatures weeping. We creatures even like to see those we love weeping sometimes. All which our Lady's example counsels is moderation. Let us relieve our hearts. It will make us less selfish. But let us not foster, embrace, rekindle, and indulge our grief. For then our sorrow is a selfish and luxurious fiction, a ground in which the Holy Spirit will not dig; for He knows there is no gold underneath.

Neither is the indulgence of grief content to stop at the mere luxury of sentiment. It goes on to do positive evil. It prompts us to dispense ourselves from the duties which our hand finds to do. It seems hard to work when we are grieving; but it is just

this hardness which renders the work so heavenly. We think that sorrow makes us privileged persons, forgetting that our privileges are only an increase of our responsibilities. They think deepest and most truly of their responsibilities who most habitually regard them as privileges. The world's work is not to stop for our sorrow. We are but units in a multitude. We must roll around from west to east with our fellows; we must meet life as life meets us; we must take joy and sorrow as they come; they mostly come both together; both are at work at once, both unresting, both unimportant; but both lie upon our road to the only thing which is of importance, and that is God. Self-importance is the canker-worm of Christian sorrow. We must not make too much of ourselves; yet this is what the world's stupid consolations try to do with those who are in grief. Dispensations are always lowering, but there is nothing which they lower so much as suffering and sorrow. Our grief is part of the world's rolling, because it is part of our own way to God. It is a going on, not a standing still, a quickening of life's time, not a letting the clock run down and stop. For the great clock goes while ours stands, so that we gain nothing and lose much. We pull down the blinds, and strew the streets, and muffle the bells, and go slowly, and tread lightly when sickness is in the house; but let us take care not to do so to sorrow in our own souls. For sorrow is by no means a sickness of the soul; it is its health and strength and vigor. Sins of omission may be more venial in times of sorrow, but they nonetheless unjewel our crown and intercept the generosity of God.

Sorrow is a sanctuary, so long as self is kept outside. Self is the desecrating principle. If a time of sorrow is not the harvest-time of grace, it is sure to be the harvest-time of self. Hence, when we find people indulging in the sentimentality of their sorrow, we are almost certain to find them inconsiderate toward others. They are the centers round which everything is to move. Everything is to be subordinate to their mourning. Thus they pay no attention to hours. They disturb the arrangements of the household. They make the servants carry part of the burden of

their wretchedness. They diffuse an atmosphere of gloom around them. They accept the services of others ungracefully, sometimes as if it was their right, because they are in grief, sometimes as if the kindness were almost an intrusion, which politeness only constrains them to endure. . . . A Christian mourner notes the least acts of thoughtfulness and is full of gratitude for them. He feels more than ever that he deserves nothing, and is surprised at the kindness he receives. He is forever thinking of others in the house, and legislating for them, and contriving that the weight of his cross shall be concentered upon himself. He smiles through his tears, takes the sorrow carefully out of the tone of his voice, and makes others almost gay while his own heart is broken. A saint's sorrow is never in the way. To others it is a softness, a sweetness, a gentleness, a beauty; it is a cross only to himself.

We must be careful also not to demand sympathy from others, and, if possible, not even to crave for it ourselves. What is it worth if it comes when we have demanded it? Surely the preciousness of sympathy is in its being spontaneous. There is no balm in it when it is paid as a tax. Not that it is wrong to hunger for sympathy when we are in sorrow. We are not speaking so much of right and wrong, as of fittest and best, of what God loves most, of what makes our sorrow heavenliest. The more consolation from creatures, the less from God. This is the invariable rule. God is shy. He loves to come to lonely hearts which other loves do not fill. This is why bereaved hearts, hearts misunderstood, hearts that have broken with kith and kin and native place and the grave of mother and father, are the hearts of His predilection. Human sympathy is a dear bargain, let it cost us ever so little. God waits outside until our company is gone. Perhaps He cannot wait so long, for visits to mourners are apt to be very long, and He goes away, not angrily, but sadly, and then how much we have missed! . . . Sorrow tends to eccentricity. The strain of endurance makes men curiously fanciful. All this we must restrain, make it part of our immolation, and offer it to God. If our sorrow intrinsically weighs one ounce, a pound of

self-sacrifice must go along with it. We must bear harder upon ourselves than God bears upon us. This is royal heartedness. The whole theology of sorrow may be compassed into a kind of syllogism. Every thing is given for sanctification, and sorrow above all other things; but selfish sorrow is unsanctified: therefore, unselfishness is grace's product out of sorrow.

To all these counsels we must add yet another. There must be in our grief a total absence of realizing the unkindness or neglect of human agents. Nobody is in fault but God, and God cannot be in fault: therefore, there is no fault at all; there is only the divine will. Faith must see nothing else. It must ignore secondary causes. It takes its crosses only from Jesus, and straight from Him. It sees, hears, feels, recognizes no one but God. The soul and its Father have the world to themselves. Oh, what a herculean power of endurance there is in the sublime simplicity of faith! But all these are hard lessons; and sorrow, if it is not peculiarly teachable, is the most unteachable of all things. Yet we could hardly expect Mary's lessons to be easy ones, least of all when she gives them from the top of Calvary.

Let us gaze at her once more, as she swathes the Body in the winding-sheet. How like a priest she seems! How like a mother! Are not all mothers priests? Ah, Mary! thy maternity was such a priesthood as the world had never seen before.

—*The Foot of the Cross*

Veiled but Distinct and Clear

I can dream of no perfection like to what I find at every turn in this most Blessed Sacrament. The tapers have a little wasted, and the flowers have a little languished; and amid the silent throng of worshippers He has heard many a secret of the heart, healed many a wound, answered many a petition, and accorded many a benediction. O look upon Him! Girt with the rings of His triple kingdom of nature, grace, and glory, how beautiful He is! And what is more than beautiful, how good!

"Why callest thou me good? There is none good but One, and that is God." Even so, Lord! and therefore it is that Thou art good: because Thou art God. He is here, down on His own earth: nature is all around Him. Grace is darting from Him, like invisible sunbeams, from off His temporary throne and from out His poor crystal prison-palace. Glory is round Him also. He has brought His own with Him. But that is not all. Wreaths of glorious angels are round His Sacramental Presence, adoring with wonder ever new the depths of this infinite compassion. To their vast intelligence the mystery of the Mass and of the Blessed Sacrament is never familiar. Not one of its least abysses could they thoroughly explore in a million of the giant years of the solar system. It is we only to whose cold love it is familiar, and to whose weak faith it is so little interesting. And with the angels, too, as revelations say, are the beatified souls of such saints as in their lifetime haunted the tabernacles for special love of this divinest mystery. Why hast Thou surrounded Thyself thus with Thy three kingdoms? Is it as a triple rampart against the coldness of my heart, and the irreverence of my scanty adoration? When I look upon Him, He reproaches me with my want of love. I could almost think those white robes stirred, and that He was going to speak, and then I should die. O that I might bargain with Him! He wants nothing of me but my love; and I want nothing of Him but more love to love Him with. Why can we not agree? He is always lovely, but never so lovely as in the Blessed Sacrament. But now that I have adored His Human Nature with all its ineffable sanctity, empires of Nature, seas of grace, realms of glory, and manifold prerogatives, I feel so unspeakably to love that peculiar presence of It, which He vouchsafes in the Blessed Sacrament, that Mary and the angels and the saints all seem too little to praise, to love, to magnify His Sacred Humanity as it deserves; and my love is only satisfied, my joy complete, to think that that glorious Body and that blessed Soul are assumed by the Person of the Eternal Word, and are so His, so belong to Him, that no union is like to that but the unity of the Father and

the Son and the Holy Ghost. All blessing be to Thee, most Holy Sacrament! for that Thou art God, and for that Thou art Man, and for that in love of us Thou art so lovingly and humbly veiled, and yet withal so indubitably distinct and clear!

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

Our Lady's Deathbed Presence

We see but two things on Calvary, Jesus and Mary; and from each we learn a lesson, one about our own death and one about the deaths of others. Jesus vouchsafes to teach us how to die. If He, in His great hour, would have His Mother by Him, how shall we dare to die without her? In all things must we imitate Jesus, although it be in a sphere so infinitely below Him. But most of all it is of importance to us to imitate Him in His death. If it had been well, He would have loved to spare her that terrific scene, though she, perhaps, would have accounted her absence a cruel mercy. It was there, at that deathbed, that she became our Mother. There is surely not one of us into whose mouth faith does not many times a day put that universal prayer of the pope and the peasant, the doctor and the scholar, of the rich and the poor, of the religious and the secular, that the Mother of God may assist us in the hour of death. But we must imbed this petition into all our prayers. Let us leave to God, without dictation or even wish, the time, the place, the manner of our death, so only that it be not an unprovided death, and, above all things, not unprovided with Mary. The hour of death is a thirsty time and exhausts great graces. Unsuspected chasms open suddenly in the soul, and swallow up old habits, past years, and a thousand other things we can ill spare then. The devil reserves his worst weapons for the last. It is very terrible not to be able to die twice, lest the novelty get the better of us the first time—and it is a tremendous mistake. There are great sacraments for that hour, but not greater than are needed. Watch a dying man! See how absolutions sink swiftly into his dry soul, like summer rain into

the gaping ground. And yet the battle is still coming and going in his eyes. Let us have Mary. Whether she be there visibly or invisibly, whether she speak and work, or work without speaking, let it be an agreement of long standing, a pledge not to be broken, that she shall be present to conduct for us a ceremonial so difficult and yet of such unutterable import. It is worth while to spend a whole life in asking this, if only we gain the object of our petition at the last. What is a good life worth if it be not crowned by a good death? Yet a good life is the nearest approach in our power to a good death. There have perhaps been comparatively few good deaths which have not come at the end of good lives. And those few, so all the believing world says, have been contrived by Mary. But a good life is the likeliest of all things to bring her to our bedside in that hour. A cross-bearing life is forever meeting Mary. At crucifixions she is present, as it were, officially. If Jesus would not die without her, she will love us all the more if we refuse to do so either. However long the agony has been, however troubled in spirit the poor passing soul, blessed above all the dead are those whose eyes Mary herself has closed!

Such is the lesson which Jesus teaches us about our own deaths. We learn one from Mary about the deaths of others. It is that devotion for those in their last agony is a Mary-like devotion and most acceptable to her Immaculate Heart. There is not a moment of the day or night in which that dread pomp of dying is not going on. There are persons like ourselves, or better than ourselves, and whose friends have with reason loved them more then ever ours have loved us, who are now straitened in their agony, and whose eternal sight of God is trembling anxiously in the balance. Can any appeal to our charity be more piteously eloquent than this? When we think of all that Mary has done for each of those souls, those who are ceaselessly, momentarily fixing their eternity in death, when we call to mind the long train of graces which she has brought to every one of them, and consequently the yearning of her maternal heart for their final per-

severance and everlasting salvation, we may form some idea of the gratefulness of this devotion to her. The deathbed is one of her peculiar spheres. She seems to exercise quite a peculiar jurisdiction over it. It is there that she so visibly co-operates with Jesus in the redemption of mankind. But she seeks for us to co-operate with her also. She would fain draw our hearts with hers, our prayers to hers. Is she not the one Mother of us all? Are not the dying our brothers and our sisters in the sweet motherhood of Mary? The family is concerned. We must not coldly absent ourselves. We must assist in spirit at every death that is died the whole world over, deaths of heretics, and heathens as well as Christians. For they, too, are our brothers and sisters; they have souls; they have eternities at stake; Mary has an interest in them. And their eternity is in more than double danger. How much more must they need prayers, who have no sacraments! How much darker must their closing scene be, where the full light of faith shines not! How much more earnest must be the prayers, when not ordinary grace, but a miracle of grace, must be impetrated for them! Alas! they will have none of our other gifts; at least, and affectionately in their own despite, they shall have our prayers. We must remember also that we too have to die. We shall one day lie in the same strait, and need unspeakably the same charitable prayers. The measure which we mete to others shall be measured to us again. This is the divine rule of retribution. Nothing will prepare a smoother deathbed for ourselves than a lifelong daily devotion to those who are daily dying. Mary assisted her Son to die in many mysterious ways. By His Will, and in the satisfaction of her own maternal love, she has now assisted at the deathbeds of many millions. She has great experience by this time, if we might so speak, and is wonderfully skilled in the science of the last hour. By prayerful thoughts, by pious practices, by frequent ejaculations, by the usages the Church has indulged, let us win a bright and gentle end for ourselves, by following Mary everywhere to the deathbeds she attends.

Such are the lessons we learn from the fifth dolor. The Crucifixion can never be rightly understood without Mary, because, without her, it is not truthfully represented. What a picture it is, the High Mass of the world's redemption, offered by Jesus to the Eternal Father, while the countless angels are the audience and the spectators! When the Host is elevated, the whole frame of inanimate nature trembles with terror and adoration, and the earth darkens itself, which is to be a rubric it is to observe in the presence of Jesus for all ages. But what is Mary's part? Her Immaculate Heart is the living altar-stone on which the Sacrifice is offered; it is the server, the beatings of whose broken heart are the responses of the liturgy; it is the thurible, in which the world's faith, the world's hope, the world's love, the world's worship, are being burnt like incense before the slain Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world; and finally, the same Immaculate Heart is the choir, the more than angelic choir, of that tremendous Mass; for, did not the silence of her beautiful sufferings sing the unutterable, voiceless songs into the ravished ear of the bleeding Host?

—*The Foot of the Cross*

4.

Nature and Grace

Whatever God Does Teaches Us Lessons

Whatever God does teaches us lessons. Each one of His works has many significances. All possible interpretations are true, so long as they are worthy of His majesty. At the very outset, the specialty of God's love of us teaches us some lessons, which we must enumerate before we go further. The first is that there is no service of God except that of love. We must love Him with a hopeless love, despairing of our ever being able to love Him as we ought. We must love Him with a brave love, which indeed calculates grace but does not calculate difficulties. We must love Him with a swift, pushing love which, like a tree, is fastening itself deeper in the ground with its roots, while it is also climbing higher into the blue sky. God's love of us is so bewilderingly great, and so bewilderingly special, that we must love Him with a glorious love to be worthy of the name of love at all. But this specialty of His love also teaches us to be afraid. Our love will be no worse for this, but all the better. It is indeed a fearful thing

to have to do with God. It is fearful to think how much He expects of us, and yet with what justice He expects so much. It is fearful to think of the sea of grace around us, which so much love and so special a love implies. It is fearful to think how easily we may slide out of our place, how easily we may miss of our work; and then whither shall we fall? Truly, to wander away from God eternally seems a cheeringly hard thing to do when we think of His love for us, and yet, almost inevitably easy when we think of His special love of us. That specialty which makes His love so sweet is just the very thing which makes our responsibilities so terrible. Even human love is half fear, and more than half fear when it is more than commonly sweet. What, then, shall we say of divine love? At least this, that he who loves most fears most.

Furthermore, the specialty of God's love impresses on us the necessity of slowness in our dealings with Him. It must not be the slowness of unwilling service, or of frightened service. It must be a prompt and generous slowness; only it must be slow. There is no hurry in eternal things. We must indeed run to do the commandments of God; but we must run cautiously, and look about us while we run. A man must move very cautiously among complicated machinery which is as swift and powerful as it is complicated. If we are not slow, we shall miss things. We shall miss seeing God and miss hearing Him also. We shall not do our work well, and we shall leave the places, where we have worked, littered and untidy. We can hardly be reverent unless we are slow. We cannot speak, even to utter acts of love, when we have run ourselves out of breath by our precipitation. We have to do with a God who paused tranquilly for four thousand years when the world was falling into the dismal abyss for want of Jesus. What is special needs to be exact; and all accuracy takes time. So, in this sense, in the spiritual life, we must let God do the swiftness, and we will do the slowness. Then, once more, the specialty of God's love teaches us that we must confine and concentrate ourselves very determinately on our own place and work, which that

love has assigned to us. In the matter of God's service, generals are good for nothing. They are universally inefficacious. We must come to particulars and rest in them. Then, of course, it is of the utmost consequence to us that we should fasten on the right particulars. In other words, it is almost of as much importance in the spiritual life to know what to leave undone as to know what to do. Indetermination has ruined as many good beginnings as either resistance or negligence. It is well to pause and think of that. . . .

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Responsibility Is the Definition of Life

There are some thoughts which, however old, are always new, either because they are so broad that we never learn them thoroughly, or because they are so intensely practical that their interest is always fresh. Such thoughts are, for the most part, very common thoughts. They are so large and so tall that they are obvious to all capacities, like the huge mountains which are visible from the plain. They require no peculiar keenness of vision; for no one can fail to perceive them. Now, among such thoughts, we may reckon that thought which all children know —that God loves every one of us with a special love. It is one of the commonest thoughts in religion, and yet so amazing that when we come to look steadily at it, we come nigh to not believing it. God does not look at us merely in the mass and multitude. As we shall stand single and alone before His judgment-seat, so do we stand, so have we always stood, single and alone before the eye of His boundless love. This is what each man has to believe of himself. From all eternity, God determined to create me, not simply a fresh man, not simply the son of my parents, a new inhabitant of my native country, an additional soul to the work of the century. But He resolved to create me such as I am, the me by which I am myself, the me by which other people know me, a different me from any that will be

created hereafter. Unnumbered possible creatures, which God saw when He chose me, He left to remain in nothingness. They might have worshipped Him a thousand times better than I shall ever worship Him. They might have been higher, holier, and more interesting. But there was some nameless thing about me that He preferred. His love fastened on something special in me. It was just I with my individual peculiarities, the size, shape, fashion, and way of my particular, single, unmated soul, which, in the calmness of His eternal predilection, drew Him to create me. I should not believe that God is God if I did not believe this. This is the profession of faith which each of us should make in our hearts. I cannot tell how men endure life, who do not profess this faith in the Creator's special love.

Moreover, we may go on to say that this specialty never leaves me. God's preservation of me is in truth a continual new creation. Other men are constantly dying. I am singled out to be kept alive. Half of mankind die before they come to the end of boyhood; I am selected for the maturity of age. Must I not infer, then, also, that in the sight of God, I stand in some peculiar relation to the whole of His great world? I clearly belong to a plan and have a place to fill, and a work to do, all which are special; and only my specialty, my particular me can fill this place or do this work. This is obvious, and yet it is overwhelming also. I almost sink under the weight of the thought. It seems to bring God so very near. Yet, in looking back over my past life, and considering it especially in reference to my present position, I see that, while I have had the most perfect liberty, I have had really very little to do with bringing things about, or settling myself in my present position. It has been done over my head, and outside of me, with exceeding suavity and yet at the same time with exceeding force. I have had very little practical influence over my own destiny. This is one side of the question. But there is another side to it. If I am to be in a special place in God's plan, and do a special work for Him, and no other place is my place, and no other work is my work, then I have a tremendous

power over myself, a power the consequences of which may not only easily be everlasting, but, as a matter of fact, must positively be everlasting. I come in sight of the most overshadowing responsibilities. Responsibility is the definition of life. It is the inseparable characteristic of my position as a creature. I am constantly moving, constantly acting. I move impulsively, and I work negligently. What then becomes of my special place and my special work? From this point of view, life looks very serious. Surely, we must trust God with a huge confidence, or we shall be frightened into going and burying our talent in the earth!

Now, what is it about us which was the prime object of God's love when He chose us for creation? It cannot be put into words. It is just all that which makes us ourselves, and distinguishes us from other selves whether created or possible. It was precisely our particularity which God so tenderly and so intensely loved. . . . This specialty of God's love startles me more and more the longer I familiarize myself with it. I am obliged to make acts of faith in God, acts of faith in all His different perfections, but the greatest act of faith in this specialty of His love of me, of me such as I am, such as I know myself to be, even such as He knows me to be. Deeper and perpetually deeper, taller and perpetually taller, the shadow of my responsibilities is cast upon me. But it is not a dark shadow, not depressing, but inspiring, sobering, but not paralyzing. I see plainly that my love of God must be as special as God's love of me. I must love Him out of my special place, love Him through my special work; and what is that place, what is that work? Is not this precisely the question of questions? . . .

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Living with Jesus

Every morning of life we begin anew. We go forth from our doors to encounter a new day on its passage to eternity. It has much to say to us, and we to it; and it carries its tale to God at

sunset, and its word is believed, and its message remembered till the doom. Would it not be an unproductive day in which we did not meet our Lord? For is not that the very meaning of our lives? If the day is meant for the sun to shine, it is but half a day, or rather it is night, if only the material sun shall shine, and the Sun of Justice also rise not on us with health upon His wings. We go out to meet Jesus in every action of the day; but we require this fourth dolor to admonish us that we must rarely expect to meet Him except with a Cross, and that a new one. When we are in sorrow, He Himself "draws near and goes with" us, as He did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. That is the privilege of sorrow. It is an attraction to our dearest Lord which He can seldom resist. Provided we seek not other comfort, He is sure to draw near and comfort us Himself. Oh, if unwary souls did but know the graces which they miss by telling their griefs and letting their fellow-creatures console them, how saints would multiply in the Church of God! We read the lives of holy persons, and wonder how ever they can have attained to such a pitch of union with God, little suspecting all the while that we have had sorrow enough to carry us further still than that, only we would not wait for Jesus; and, if we will not let Him have the first word, He may perchance send His angels to fulfil our consolation, but He will not come Himself. But when we take the initiative, when we ourselves go out to meet Him, and we do so by our promises in prayer, by our open profession of piety, by our ecclesiastical vocation, by our religious profession, by the works of mercy to which we have now by usage committed ourselves, then it is always with the Cross that we encounter Him. Why, then, are we so amazed when crosses come? When it has happened thus often, do we not see that it is a law, a law of the kingdom of grace, and that not to perceive it is to lose half its blessing, by missing the promptitude of obedience? We lay ourselves in the arms of our heavenly Father, knowing not what is to come, only that much is to come, more than without Him we could possibly bear; let us lie still now that

we are here, and not be surprised into retracting the offerings we once have made. What cross we shall meet today we know not: sometimes we cannot guess. But we know that if we meet Jesus we shall meet a Cross, and evening will find us with the burden on our backs. Only let us remember this invariable peculiarity of these divine encounters, and then, if we are reverently wary in making promises, we shall also be reverently firm in keeping our resolutions.

Some men meet Him, and turn away. Some see Him far off, and turn down another road. Some come close up, and leap down the precipice at the side, as if He were a destroying angel blocking the way. Some pass by, pretending they do not know Him. He has been walking cross-laden in thousands of earth's roads today; but He has had a few honest greetings. Faith and love have made some men too timid to pass Him or avoid Him, but they have expostulated with Him about the cross, and have wept out loud when He persisted. Some follow in the sullenness of servile obedience, and drag their cross, and it jolts upon the stones, and hurts them all the more, and they fall, but their falls are not in union with those three of His upon the old Way of the Cross. Few kneel down with the alacrity of glad surprise, and kiss His feet, and take the cross off His back, and shoulder it almost playfully, and walk by His side, singing psalms with Him, and smiling when they totter beneath the load. But oh! the beauty of that day's sunset to such as these! They "constrain Him," saying, "Stay with us, because it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." And He goes in with them. This is what we should do. Can we do it? No! but we can try, and then He will do it in us. But He *meets* us with the Cross. This implies much. It implies that we must turn back from our own road, and that all the way we went till we met Him was but a waste of strength and fruitless travelling. We can only carry our crosses one way, and that is heavenward. They keep our faces in that direction. They push us up hill; down hill they would prostrate us, and fall heavily upon us, and kill us. All the faces of cross-carriers are

turned one way. The end, which is meant to go into the earth, points to the earth: the cross of the cross looks over our shoulders into heaven, and rights itself there, however unsteady we may be, like the needle always trembling in reverent fidelity toward the pole. So let us not miss our opportunity, but take up our cross at once, and turn round and follow Him; for so only shall we fall into the Procession of the Predestinate.

—*The Foot of the Cross*

Disquietudes Are Worth the Pain

The problem of the world often weighs heavy on our spirits, and for different reasons at different times. One while it is that life is weary and difficult. All about it seems long and tiresome, as if it never would end, and we could never hold on till the last. The pressure of duties, instead of being lightened by habit, is aggravated by continuance, while the powers of endurance are worn out or weakened. The result of it all is disgust with our daily duties, want of devotion in our spiritual exercises, and the loss of sweetness and obligingness in our intercourse with each other. Another while our trial is that life is dark and without prospects. Just as a summer day sometimes closes in, and the sky is obscured by a coating of grey clouds, which have grown together without warning, and form a silent, motionless, impenetrable, mass; so is our sky overcast and oppressive. Everything looks wrong. We cannot work because we are languid; and we cannot rest because we are anxious and irritable. We do not know where to find fault, though we know that fault there is, and that it is in ourselves.

Another time when we have been quietly occupying our minds with devotional things, and living in a tranquil course of prayer, thoughts of another order begin to drift upon us, and at last gather in such number and with such force as to master and possess our minds. They are not exactly temptations against the

faith, but they are akin to them. The Church seems to lose in our minds the dignity it possessed. We are inclined to criticize. Things which lately impressed us now make us peevish. The world's side of the question grows upon us. We do not quite see, though it was so extremely clear but a while ago, how modern movements of polity, civilization, and science, fit in with the position and actual operations of the Church. We do not think theologians do the world justice; and the conversation of pious men on the subject sounds to us flippant, self-sufficient, and wanting both in a wide knowledge of facts and a larger temper to weigh them and to appreciate them: while Catholic writers appear to fall short of the intellectual standard of their adversaries. Then there are great vexatious questions which rise up suddenly in our minds, often considered before, and which we imagined we had dealt with and laid to rest satisfactorily; but now they swell to prodigious dimensions, and seem imperiously to require answers, and we cast about in vain for such as shall satisfy us in our present mood. It dawns upon us that the world is very good, and the people of the world very good, and yet that all this goodness is mostly without grace. Or on the other hand it comes to us that the world is enormously evil, and the very enormity of it makes us terrified to give the Christian answers to the questions which straightway arise; and so we come to look quietly on heresy and schism, as if there might easily be evils more terrific than those. Besides this, the world is so loud and positive on its own side; and in spite of ourselves this positive decided air and tone carries us along with it. We begin to give the world a more respectful hearing, because we think we have done it an injustice heretofore. If in this crisis we happen to fall in with good people who have never been so disturbed, and who treat these difficulties lightly, and meet them with some commonplace solutions, or who regard them merely as symptoms of moral disease, woe be unto us; for we grow angry with truth when it is represented to us as these good people represent it, as at once

superficial and unjust, arbitrary and yet shallow. How shall a man who does not see a difficulty be able to answer it, simply because another puts it before him?

Then our difficulties change. We seem to lose our equilibrium. We have reckoned upon grace and ourselves for certain duties, and have in consequence involved ourselves in certain responsibilities; and we are out in our reckonings. Either we have mistaken ourselves, or we have not calculated our own defects sufficiently, and their bearing on our work; or old habits have lost their power and died out, or for some hidden reason grace lies inoperative in us. What is the matter? Are we passing into a different spiritual condition? Are time, and life, and the necessity of persevering, about to treat us as we read of their treating others, and to be too much for us? We are in the position of astronomers who have drawn up tables to go by, and are all thrown out because they have omitted to allow for certain inequalities, and surrender themselves to an ill-humored despair because they have not vigor enough to sit down and make their calculations over again.

It does not remove the difficulties to say that all these are temptations, as they really are. To give them their true name does not remove their difficulty. They are part of the restlessness and impatience of the imperfections of our understanding, as well as of the vanity, self-love, and morbid sensitiveness of our moral nature. Besides which they are effects which we might have reckoned on beforehand from the power of the world and the bright light of its empire, its wisdom, and its civilization. It would be contrary to all laws if we could move in our orbits without any eccentricities, in the presence of so monstrous and so attractive a mass as the world and the world's belongings form. Nay, the more we observe what is going on around us, the more we strive to keep pace with a state of things which it is our duty to impress, and which we never can impress while we are behind it; in a word, the more thoughtful we are, the more at times must the disturbances of this mass be upon us. Long thought will set

it right, if with long thought we join humble prayer, and a cheerful promptitude in our relations with others. The keen suffering, sometimes the intolerable anguish, of these trials are necessary, both for our own good, and for the power of doing good to others. That they are, not universally, but generally, accompanied by faults on our side is clear. But we must be careful not to exaggerate this. On the whole it does not appear the wisest course either wholly to entertain such temptations or wholly to repulse them. Both the efforts are bad, and do the temptations in question too much honor. Diversion and distraction seem to be at once the most reasonable, the most easy, and in the end the most successful methods of recovering our lost peace and working back into the old sunshine again.

Of these distractions none is more powerful or tranquillizing than devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Many a time when a man is wild with questions, the doubts, the despairs, the uncertainties, the fears, with which a view of life has surrounded him, and which are barking and baying at him, like so many dogs, he goes by an instinct of grace to the Blessed Sacrament, and in a moment, without effort on his part, all these shrill voices are silent. His Lord is with him, the waves are still, the storm is abated, and not after further voyage but straightway he is at the haven where he should be. One look at the face of Jesus, and the clouds fall away, and there is light. The light of the tabernacle illuminates the Church, and the illumination deepens the darkness of all that is outside. Not flesh and blood, but the Eternal Father has revealed to us His Divinity, as He did to Peter of old, and though in ourselves we are ready through weakness to deny Him yet by His grace we are ready to die for Him. No one comes to Jesus, except the Father draw Him, and then Jesus shows us the Father, and it suffices us. Thus the Blessed Sacrament is everything to us. We have our dearest Lord with us, what care we for aught else? Darkness is only pleasant shade, when He is nigh. Disquietudes are worth their pains, for the extreme sweetness of having His gentle hand to smooth them

down. Difficulties were desirable to go through, if it were only to see Him come forth, the sun of truth, and illuminate all things with so sudden and so radiant a beauty. And the repose of it all is so wonderful! For it is there, at the door of the tabernacle, that we find our true place in creation, that our pride is tamed while our wounds are being dressed and healed, and our restlessness is made ashamed while it is rebuked by that voiceless love. What we guessed at and doubted heretofore, now we feel, we touch, we taste, we know. Our own littleness, the world's grandeur and its mischief, the glory and the justice of God, the manifold meanings of Jesus, and the joy of being in His Church, all lie before us in their proper places and in their true proportions, clear, beautiful, and harmonious. In a word, to have God so given up to us, to be with us and to be ours, as He is in the Blessed Sacrament, is our all in all.

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

The Magnificence of God

Let us kneel down before the magnificence of God. It is outstretched as an ocean of manifold Being and yet of indivisible, uncreated Life, intolerable in its splendor, uncircumscribed in its simplicity. His magnificence is the vastness of His beauty, the multitude of His perfections, the coruscations of His sanctity, the impetuosity of His communicativeness, the minuteness of His government, the strange celestial sweetness of His gifts, the prodigality of His tenderness, the abysses of His incredible condescensions, and the exuberance of His simplicity. There are many words, but the idea is one. Our thought of God's magnificence is as a sea. It changes not, but it changes while we look upon it. We see the calm of eternity upon its waters, peaceful as an endless evening. Airs from a far country come quivering over its shining tracts, freighted with aromatic odors, which are diffused around, and sensibly deepen the tranquility. Then again, the freshness of morning is upon its swaying fields; and a thou-

sand waves crest themselves with foam, and fling up star-showers into the sunlight; and it booms upon the shore; and it makes us feel the gentleness of power which knows how to become terrible; and the visible unexerted omnipotence is an admonition to prayer. Then it clothes itself with the plumage of darkness, and murmurs in the midnight as if it were gone down to a great distance, in order that we may know how different it is when it is felt from what it is when it is seen. Another while it lies grey-green beneath a sunless sky, with snow-capped cliffs around, sovereign when all else is subject, free when all else has lost its liberty, immutable when all else has suffered winter's change. It has also its tempests, more beautiful and more terrible than the glorious storms of earth. Its lightnings make the darkness around it palpable and solid. Its thunders command a universal silence. Its decrees rush after each other in mighty waves of orderly confusion, menacing the land like falling towers, and breaking in dull inarticulate shocks against the precipices of the divine justice. Yet, evermore, in storm or calm, there lies upon the ocean the light of the Precious Blood of Jesus, restful as the golden red of evening, hopeful as the rosy flush of dawn. This is the figure of the magnificence of God.

There is nothing more glorious upon earth than magnificence, nothing which more delights the mind or expands the soul, while it gratifies the senses at the same time that it ennobles their pleasure. But, among creatures, magnificence is always a revelation of defects. Indeed, it not only discloses imperfections, but causes them. It is too great an effort. It calls for sacrifices which had better not have been made. It is often obliged to be regardless of justice. It is made up of imprudences. There is for the most part a tyranny about it. Much suffering has generally to be contributed to it; and the suffering falls mostly on those who have not the glory of the magnificence. Moreover, it is debased by ostentation, and disfigured by pretense. Nevertheless, it wins the applause of men, and even lives in history. The nations will pardon almost anything to magnificence. It seems to satisfy a want

of the soul which is rarely satisfied. It refreshes the littleness of the creature; and even when it is the glory of one man, it is felt as if it were that one man's gift to all mankind. What then must be the beauty and the delight of magnificence when it is supremely holy? What must be its grandeur where it is natural? How great must be its splendor when it is the normal expression and the simple exercise of innumerable perfections! There is no effort in the magnificence of God, and no display. It is not a transient demonstration. It is the refulgence of His eternal quietude. It is the brightness of His infinite justice. It is the unchanging aspect of His glorious sanctity. It is the inevitable light of the riches of His Godhead. It is the self-possessed enjoyment of His beatitude. To us all holiness is a form of restraint. We can hardly form to ourselves any other conception of it. If we try to do so, we shall be surprised to find how difficult it is. Think, then, what holiness must be where it is a form of largeness, of prodigality, of boundless freedom! Yet this is the magnificence of God.

Roses grow on briars, say the wise men of the world, with that sententious morality which thinks to make virtue truthful by making it dismal. Yes! but, as the very different spirit of piety would say, it is truer that briars bloom with roses. If roses have thorns, thorns also have roses. This is the rule of life. Yet, everybody tells us one side of this truth, and nobody tells us the other. A kind-hearted man finds life full of joys, for he makes joy of things which else were not joys; and a simple-hearted man can be very joyous on a little joy; and to the pure-hearted man all things are joys. How can the world be an unhappy world, which has so magnificent a God? His magnificence is the fountain of all our joys, for it is the fountain of salvation. Here lies the secret of the inveterate happiness of the world. Even in its fall it is so implicated in the blessedness of God that it has not a darkness anywhere without its light, nor a bitter without its sweet. . . . We ourselves have a hundred happinesses, even when we fancy ourselves quite desolate. There is no real desolation except mortal sin. There is too much of God everywhere to allow either of

permanent or general unhappiness. He who can find his joy in God, is in heaven already; only it is a heaven which is not secured to him unless he perseveres to the end. Yet is it hard to find our joy in God? Rather is it not hard to find our joy in anything else? The magnificence of God is the abounding joy of life. It is an immense joy to belong to God. It is an immense joy to have such a God belonging to us. Like the joys of heaven, it is a new joy every morning when we wake, as new as if we had never tasted it before. Like the joys of earth, it is a joy every evening resting and pacifying the soul. But it has a gift of its own besides. For its novelty grows fresher and more striking daily, and its repose more satisfying and more complete. The joy of God's magnificence more than counterbalances all mortal griefs. When I think of His magnificence, of all that His magnificence implies, of its intimate concernment with myself, and of the way in which I am always sinking more and more irretrievably into the abysses of his sovereignty, I often wonder how we can contain ourselves with joy at having such a God.

—*The Precious Blood*

A Despotic World-Presence

Human respect is a fault most keenly felt by spiritual persons, and comparatively little felt by others. It is more like an atmosphere than anything else, and can hardly be caught and punished in distinct acts. Yet it is a thing of which there can be no doubt. We have an infallible consciousness of it. It gives undeniable evidence of its own existence. It destroys all liberty and becomes the positive tyrant of a man's life. Yet, if we look well into it, nothing can be more stupid than our submission to it, for we set little or no value on the separate opinions of individuals; and, when the judgment is in our favor, it can do us no good; neither, unless true, can it afford us any rational pleasure. Indeed its power is altogether in the prospect, and not in the present possession. Yet it is almost universal, and must be dealt with as one of

the most inconvenient facts of the spiritual life. Look at a person who is completely under its domination. Watch him in society and in public life, or in the bosom of his family, or in the intimacies of friendship, or at confession and in conference with his director, or even with God in prayer, or in solitude. It is as if the omnipresence of God was sponged out all around him, and that some other powerful eye was fixed upon him ruling him with a power like that of the solar light, and causing in him at all times an almost preternatural uneasiness.

It is not difficult to see the evils of this miserable world-presence, this spirit which gathers all mankind up into an eye, and throws its portentous fascination upon our souls. It causes men to be false and insincere in their mutual relations and to act inconsiderately with others. It destroys all generous enthusiasm either for charity or penance. It puts a man under the despotism of ridicule which becomes a kind of false god to him. It is the contradictory of perfection, and while it is in force, renders it impossible; for it is always drawing us off from God to creatures. A brood of sins of omission follows it wherever it goes, sprung from shame and the fear of ridicule, and another brood of sins of commission, from the desire to please. In process of time, and the process is not slow, it establishes itself as an habitual distraction in prayer and meditation; and, as to examination of conscience, that most real of spiritual exercises, almost seems to supply food to the voracity of human respect.

It is as miserable as it is evil. The bondage of Carthusian austerity would be easier to bear. No slavery is more degraded and unhappy. What a misery to be ashamed of our duties and our principles! What a misery that every action should have a flaw in it and a blight upon it! What a misery to lose at last, as we must inevitably do, the very thing for which all our sacrifices have been made, the respect of others! Misery of miseries, thus to lose even respect for self! Religion, which ought to be our peace, becomes our torment. The very sacraments have a feeling of incompleteness about them as if we did not, as we do not, use

them rightly; and our communication with our director, which should be medicinal, is poisoned by this spirit. Surely we must try to get to the bottom of the matter, and to study the various phases of this disease of pious souls. A general wish to please, a laying ourselves out in particular subject matters in order to please, building castles in the air and imagining heroic acts, reflecting on the praise bestowed upon us, and giving way to low spirits when dispraised—these are all manifestations of this horrible human respect.

Human respect, however, is not so much a particular fault, as a whole world of faults. It is the death of all religion. We shall never have an adequate horror of it until we admit that these hard words are no exaggeration. Let us therefore look at the place it occupies in the grand struggle between good and evil. First of all, let us trace its rise; for this is a difficult problem, considering how in detail we all disbelieve in each other. The especial task of Christians is the realization of the invisible world. They have different standards of right and wrong from the votaries of earth. They live inextricably mixed up with the children of the world, as men using the same language with different meanings, and the confusion and apparent deceit grow worse every day, and the world, the owner of the territory or its lessee, more and more angry, and inclined, in spite of its theory of haughty toleration, to persecute those who wilfully put themselves at variance with the public peace. Men feel that religious people are right, and on that very account they will not look the fact in the face, and realize it. They feel it because they feel that they are not irresponsible. Yet they chafe at the judgments of God and His incessant interference; at the quiet way in which He gives his judgments, and takes His own time to execute His verdicts. So, not being able to do without the judicial power, they consolidate God from three Divine Persons into a function, a cause, a pantheistic fluid, or a mechanical force, and transfer the judicial power to mankind in a body. This seems to be the account of human respect in the mind. Men in all generations fret under God's judicial

power. It seems as if, because of this fretfulness, it were one of the most unutterable of His compassions that He should have confided His ultimate judicial rights to our Lord as Man, and that in virtue of the Sacred Humanity He should be our judge. Looked at in a human point of view, men's transfer of the judicial power to themselves may be said to have worked out admirably. Social comfort, a standard of endurable morals, and generally what may be called for the moment *live-ableness*, have come of it. It causes a certain amount of individual unhappiness, because its police are harsh and rough, and the procedures of its courts unkindly and of the Draconian school. But men have a compensation for this in its giving over to them, utterly unquestioned, the whole region of thought. Under the administration of God, thoughts were acts and were tried and found guilty as such. They furnished the most abundant materials for its tribunals, and were just what caused His jurisdiction to press heavily upon the soul. Now all this is free. Calumny, detraction, rash judgments, spiteful criticism—they make us wince as they visit our outward acts; but we may be as base as we please in thought, and yet walk through human courts with proud eye and head erect.

No wonder that when once human respect had taken its place among the powers of the world, it should cause especial desolation in the religious mind, and become a worse evil and a greater misery there than elsewhere. For it is itself a sort of spurious counterfeit religion. For what is religiousness but the sensible presence of God, and religion the worship of Him? In religion the presence of God is our atmosphere. Sacraments, and prayer, and mortification, and all the exercises of the spiritual life are so many appointments, not only for realizing it, but for substantially introducing it into both body and soul. The respiration of our soul depends upon it. It produces a certain kind of character, a type of its own sort and easily recognized, a supernatural character which inspires other men with awe, love, hatred, or contempt, according to the different points of view from which they look at

it. To the pure-minded, it is the greatest possible amount of happiness on earth; for it infuses into us a certain marvelous unreasoning instinct for another world, as being faith's sight of Him who is invisible. Yet it is hardly conscious of what it is it sees. Now, is not human respect, in its own way, a simple copy and caricature of all this? A something which undertakes to perform for the world every function which the presence of God performs for the enlightened soul? It is, in fact, a mental paganism.

It is this similarity to a false religion which makes human respect so peculiarly dangerous. It does not alarm us by any grossness. On the contrary, it forces sin into concealment. Not that this is any real boon to the best interests of men, for certain of the deadliest sins thrive best under cover. It confuses the boundaries between public opinion and itself, and pretends an alliance with prudence and discretion. This is a stratagem to be guarded against. For public opinion is, within limits, a legitimate power; and the man who, because he was devout, should lay it down as a principle that he would never respect public opinion or be swayed by it, would be paving the way for the triumphs of delusion. Nothing can be more alien to the moderation of the Church. There is a vast difference between what my fellow-citizens expect of me and show beforehand that they expect and give good reasons for expecting, and the criticism they may pass upon my actions and my doing them rather with reference to that criticism than to the wish of God. I may be very indifferent to the criticism while I am bound to respect the expectation. Moreover, human respect unsupernaturalizes actions which are good in substance. It kills the nerve of the intention but it gives us no such smart warning as the nerve of a tooth does in dying. It is like a worm in a nut; it eats away the kernel of our motive and lets the fruit hang as fairly from the tree as ever. Religion is so much a matter of motives that this amounts to destroying it altogether, and as human respect introduces a directly wrong motive in lieu of the right one, it destroys spirituality in the most fatal

way. Thus it is one of the completest instruments, which corrupt nature puts into the devil's hands and at his disposal for the destruction of souls. What can be more hateful than this, and what more odious in the sight of God? A caricature is always odious, and it is odious in proportion to the beauty and dignity of what it caricatures; and, as we have seen, human respect is a caricature of the presence and judicial power of God.

Few are aware, until they honestly turn to God, how completely they are the slaves of this vice. Then they wake up to a sense of it, and see how it is in their blood, as if it were their life and their identity, an inexplicable, unconquerable, vital thing. Its rise is a mystery, for which we can only invent a theory. No one can tell for sure how it rose, or when, or why; it has been like an exhalation from corrupt humanity, the spreading of a silent pestilence that has no external symptoms. There is not a class of society which it has not mastered, no corner of private life that it has not invaded, no convent cell but its air is freighted with the poisonous influence. It rivals what theologians call the pluri-presence of Satan. Its strength is so great that it can get the better of God's commandments and of the precepts of His Church, nay, of a man's own will, which last conquest even grace and penance find it difficult to achieve. It appears to increase with civilization and with the extension of all means of locomotion and publicity. In modern society, men systematize it, acknowledge it as a power, uphold its claims, and punish those who refuse submission. God is an ex-king among us, legitimate perhaps, but deposed. It is much if we build Him in His own kingdom a house made with hands that He may dwell therein, and keep Himself within doors. Surely, if the evil one has not preternaturally helped human respect, he has at least concentrated his energies on its spread and success. He is never more a prince than when he stoops to be the missionary of human respect.

Look into your own soul and see how far this power has brought you into subjection. Is there a nook in your whole being

where you can sit down unmolested and breathe fresh air? Is there any exercise, however spiritual, any occupation, however sacred, any duty however solemn, over which the attractive influence of human respect is not being exercised? Have you any sanctuary, the inside of which it has never seen? When you have thought it conquered, how often has it risen up again, as if defeat refreshed it like sleep? Does it not follow you as your shadow, as a perpetual black spot in the sweet sunshine? Yet, how long is it since you turned to God, and became spiritual? How many Lents and months of Mary have you passed, how many sacraments received, how many indulgences gained? And yet, this human respect, so active, so robust, so unwearied, so ubiquitous? Can there be any question nearer your heart than what concerns the remedies for this evil?

The Church provides remedies for it in two ways: in her general system, and in her dealing with individual souls. She begins by boldly pronouncing a sentence of excommunication against the world, ignores its judgments in her own subject-matter of religion, and proclaims its friendship nothing less than a declaration of war against God. She gives her children different standards of right and wrong from the world, and an opposite rule of conduct. All her positive precepts and her obligations of outward profession of faith are so many protests against human respect, and she canonizes just those men who have been heroes in their contempt for it. The world feels and understands the significance of these things, and shows it by anger, exhibiting all the quick jealousy of a conscious usurper.

But of far greater efficacy are the remedies which she administers to single souls in the confessional and in spiritual direction. The world dreads the secret power of that benign, cogent, and unreported tribunal. First of all, the practice of the Presence of God is pitted against this universal human respect. We are taught how to act slowly, and to unite all our actions to God by a pure intention. We are bidden to take this fault as the subject of our particular examination of conscience, to pray earnestly

against it, and to be full about our falls when we accuse ourselves in confession. Even in indifferent things, we are recommended to adopt that line of conduct which tells most against human respect, were it only for the sake of mortification. This is often the rationale of the seemingly absurd and childish mortifications imposed in religious houses. For human respect is but a veiled worship of self, which we seem to transfer to the world, because self is even to us so small an object. And whatever kills this worship of self, as such mortifications do, is a blow to human respect. In casting out devils, the saints have often delighted to use puerile means; so also may we cast this devil out of ourselves. Once let our souls be possessed by a timid, child-like devotion to the Eye of God, eternal and unsleeping, and human respect will die away and disappear as the autumnal leaves waste in the rain, and enrich the soil for the coming spring.

—*Growth in Holiness*

The One Grand Thing: Our Service of God

There are twenty-four hours in the day, so many days in the week, and so many weeks in the year. We have various occupations, and manifold ways of spending our time; and the most careless amongst us must have some confused and general notion of the way in which his time is distributed. Now we know that the service of God is the grand thing, or rather, that it is the only thing about us which is great at all. What amount of our time, then, is spent upon it? How many hours of the day are passed in prayer, in spiritual reading, in hearing Mass, or in visiting the Blessed Sacrament, or in other direct exercises? Of the time necessarily expended upon our worldly avocations, or the claims of society, how much time is spent with any recollection of Him, or with any actual intention to do our common actions for His glory? Can we return a satisfactory answer to these questions? Furthermore, we know that it is essential to our love of God that we should appreciate Him above all things. Does our practice

show that this is anything but a form of words with us? Would strangers, who looked critically at our daily lives, be obliged to say that, whatever faults we had, it was plain that we put no such price on anything as on God? When we look into the interests and affections of our busy, crowded hearts, is it plain that, if the love of God does not reign there in solitary, unmingled splendor, at least it takes easy, obvious, and acknowledged precedence of all our other loves? This is not asking much: but can we answer as we should wish? Again, our actions are perfectly multitudinous. If we reckon both the outward and the inward ones, they are almost as numerous as the beatings of our pulse. How many of them are for God? I do not say how many are directly religious, but how many are at all, and in any sense for God? How many in the hundred? Even if we are quite clear that a virtual intention has really got vigor and vitality enough to carry us over the breadth of a whole day, and to push its way through the crowd of things we have to think, to say, to do and to suffer—and this is a very large assumption—is this virtual intention in the morning to absolve us from the necessity of any further advertence to God, and must it not also have been made in the morning with a very considerable degree of intensity, in order to propel it for so long a time as twenty-four hours through such a resisting medium as we know our daily lives to be? To use our national word, are we quite comfortable about this? Are we sure of our view about virtual intention, and without misgivings, and have we found our theory work well in times gone by?

God does not have His own way in this world. What He gets He has to fight for. What is true of the world at large, is true also of our own hearts and lives. Though we love God, and most sincerely, He has to struggle for our love. He has to contend for the mastery over our affections. The preferences of our corrupt nature are not for Him, or for His concerns. Thus it happens that almost daily His claims clash with those of self or of the world. We have to choose between the two, and give the preference to the one over the other. We are forever having Christ and Barabbas

offered to the freedom of our election. Now, do we always give the preference to God? Or, if not always, because of surprises, impulses, impetuosities, or sudden weaknesses, at least do we never wilfully, deliberately, and with advertence, prefer anything else to God, and give Him the second place? And, of the innumerable times in which this conflict occurs, in what proportion of times does God carry off the victory? And, when He does, is it an easy victory? Or has He to lay long siege to our hearts and bring up reinforcement after reinforcement of fresh untired grace, until at last it looks as if He were going to throw Himself on His omnipotence, and overwhelm the freedom of our will? Or again, let us look at the degree of application which we bestow on what we really do for God. Let us confront the carefulness, the forethought, and energy and perseverance which we bestow on our temporal interests or the earthly objects of our love with those which characterize our spiritual exercises. And will the result of the examination be altogether what we desire?

All these are childish and elementary questions to ask ourselves. Yet the results are far more melancholy than when we contemplated the ignorance, aversion, and indifference of the great mass of men. More melancholy because we profess to be God's champions; it is, as it were, our place to be on His side. We live encircled by His grace, which flows around us like the plentiful bright air. Our minds are illuminated by the splendors of heavenly truth, and our hearts led sweetly captive by the winning mysteries of the Incarnation. Our lives are charmed by great sacraments, and we are each of us the center of a very world of invisible grandeurs and spiritual miracles. And in spite of all this, I will not say it is sad, it is really hardly credible that our love of God should amount to so little as it does, whether we regard it as to the time spent upon it, or as to the appreciation of Him above all things, or as to the proportion of our numberless actions which is for Him or as to our preference of Him when His claims clash with others, or as to the degree of application which we bestow on what we really do for Him. Oh, look at all

this by the moonlight of Gethsemane, or measure it with the Way of the Cross, or confront it with the abandonment of Calvary! Turn upon it the light of the great love of Creation, whose prodigal munificence and incomparable tenderness, and seemingly exaggerated compassions we have already contemplated! Oh, how can it be that this is the creature's return to his Creator, when the creature is faithful and good, and that such is to be God's strong point in the world, the paradise of His delights, the portion of His empire, where allegiance is still paid Him? Merciful Heaven! Can we be safe if we go on thus? Are we really in a state of grace? Is not the whole spiritual life a cruel delusion? And are we not, after all, the enemies and not the friends of God? Oh no! faith comes to our rescue. All is right, though truly all is wrong. We are certainly in the way of salvation. Then we say once more, as we find ourselves saying many times a day, what a God is ours, what incredible patience, what unbounded forbearance, what unintelligible contentment! Why is it that very shame does not sting us to do more for God, and to love Him with a love a little less infinitely unlike the love, with which, do what we can, we cannot hinder Him from loving us?

—*Creator and Creature*

Kindness

The worst kind of unhappiness comes from our conduct to one another. If our conduct were under the control of kindness, it would be nearly the opposite of what it is and so the state of the world would be almost reversed.

We are, for the most part, unhappy because the world is an unkind world for lack of kindness in the units that compose it. If this is only so much as half true, it is worth while to gain a clear and definite notion of kindness. We practice more easily what we already know more clearly. . . .

Kindness is the overflowing of self on others. We put others in the place of self. We treat them as we would wish to be treated

ourselves. . . . Then again, kindness is the coming to the rescue of others when they need it and it is in our power to supply what they need; and this is the work of the attributes of God toward His creatures. His omnipotence is forever making up our deficiency of power. His justice is continually correcting our erroneous judgments. His mercy is always consoling our fellow-creatures under our hard-heartedness. His truth is perpetually hindering the consequences of our falsehood. His omniscence makes our ignorance succeed as if it were knowledge. His perfections are perpetually coming to the rescue of our imperfections. This is the definition of Providence; and kindness is the imitation of this divine action.

Kindness is like divine grace; it gives something which neither self nor nature can give, such as consolation; and, besides this, the manner in which it is given is a true gift in itself, better far than the thing which is given. . . . It is kindness that makes life's capabilities blossom and paints them with its cheering hues, and endows them with their invigorating fragrance. It does unnecessary work which, when done, looks like the most necessary work that could be. Even when it is economical in what it gives, it is not economical of the gracefulness with which it gives it. If it goes to soothe a sorrow, it does more than soothe it; if it relieves a want, it cannot do so without doing more than relieve it. Its manner is something extra. . . . We never think of sorrow as being a common growth of our nature, common in the sense of being of little value. It is the nobility of man. It is a divine thing rather than a human one and it is human because it springs from the soul of man just at the point where the divine image was graven deepest. . . .

Kindness makes life more endurable. There are many men to whom life is always approaching the unbearable. . . . It is true that we make ourselves more unhappy than other people make us. No slight portion of this self-inflicted unhappiness arises from our sense of justice being so continually wounded by the events of life. There are some men whose practical talents are com-

pletely swamped by the keenness of their sense of injustice. They go through life as failures, because the pressure of injustice upon themselves or the sight of its pressing upon others has unmanned them. If they begin a line of action, they cannot go through with it. They had much in them, but they have died without anything coming of objects from which they were perpetually shying. Kindness steps forward to remedy this evil also. Each solitary kind action that is done is working briskly in its own sphere to restore the balance between right and wrong. . . . Kindness allies itself with right to invade the wrong and beat it off the earth. Justice is necessarily an aggressive virtue, and kindness is the amiability of justice. . . .

God means the world to be a happy world; He gave it the power to be happy and kindness was a great part of that very power. . . . It is laboring always in ten thousand places to make God's world more like His original conception of it. While it is ministering to Him as Creator, it is no less energetic and successful in preparing and enlarging His ways as Saviour. It is constantly winning strayed souls back to Him, opening hearts that seemed obstinately closed, and enlightening minds that had been wilfully darkened, lifting endeavor from low to high and from high to higher, and from higher to highest.

Everywhere kindness is the best pioneer of the Precious Blood. We often begin our own repentance by acts of kindness or through them. Probably the majority of repentances have begun in the reception of acts of kindness, which, if not unexpected, touched men by the sense of their being so undeserved. Kindness has converted more sinners than either zeal, eloquence, or learning; and these have never converted anyone unless they were kind also. In short, kindness makes us as gods to each other. Yet, while it lifts us so high, it sweetly keeps us low. For the continual sense which the kind heart has of its own need of kindness keeps it humble. There are no hearts to which kindness is so indispensable as those that are kind themselves.

What does kindness do to those to whom we show it? We

have looked on its office on a grand scale in the whole world. Let us limit our field of observation and see what it does for those who are its immediate objects. What we note first, as of great consequence, is the immense power of kindness in bringing out the good points in the characters of others. Almost all men have more goodness in them than the ordinary intercourse of the world enables us to discover. Indeed most men, we may be sure from the glimpses we now and then obtain, carry with them to the grave much undeveloped nobility. Life is seldom so adventurous or so varied as to enable a man to unfold all that is in him. A creature who has capabilities within him to live forever, can hardly have room in threescore years to do more than give specimens of what he might and will be. But, besides this, who has not seen how disagreeable and faulty characters will expand under kindness? Generosity springs up fresh and vigorous from under a superincumbent load of meanness. Virtues come to life and in their infantile robustness strangle habits which a score of years has been spent in forming. It is wonderful what capabilities grace can find in the most unpromising character. . . .

Kindness reveals a man to himself. It rouses the long-dormant self-respect with which grace will speedily ally itself and purify it by its alliance. It develops as well as reveals. It gives these newly-disclosed capabilities of virtue vigor and animation. It presents them with occasions. It causes the first actions of the recovering soul to be actions on high principles and from generous motives. It shields and defends moral convalescence from the dangers which beset it.

A kind act has picked up many a fallen man who has afterward slain his tens of thousands for the Lord and has entered the Heavenly City at last as a conqueror amidst the acclamations of the saints and with the welcome of his Sovereign.

It is not improbable that no man ever had a kind act done to him who did not in consequence commit a sin less than he otherwise would have done. I can look out over the earth at any hour and I see in spirit innumerable angels threading the crowds

of men and hindering sin by all manner of artifices which shall not interfere with the freedom of man's will. I see also invisible grace made visible for the moment, flowing straight from God, in and upon and around the souls of men and sin giving way and yielding place to it. Together with grace and the angels there is a third band of diminutive figures flitting everywhere, making gloomy men smile while angry men grow meek, lighting up hope in the eyes of the dying, sweetening the heart of the bitter, and adroitly turning men away from sin just when they are on the point of committing it. They seem to have strange power. Men listen to them who have been deaf to the pleading of angels. They gain admittance into hearts before the doors of which grace has lost its patience and gone away. No sooner are the doors opened than these ministers of God have gone and return with lightning speed, bringing back grace with them. They are most versatile in their operations. One while they are the spies of grace, another while its sappers and miners, another while its light cavalry, another while they bear the brunt of the battle, and for more than five thousand years they have hardly known the meaning of defeat. These are the acts of kindness which are daily enrolled in God's service from the rising to the setting of the sun; and this is the second work they do in souls—to lessen the number of their sins. There are few gifts more precious to a soul than to make its sins fewer. It is in our power to do this almost daily and sometimes often in a day.

Another work which our kindness does in the hearts of others is to encourage them in their efforts after good. Habits of sin, even when put to death as habits, leave many evil legacies behind them. One of the most disastrous parts of the inheritance is discouragement. There are few things that resist grace as it does. Obstinacy even is more hopeful. We may see floods of grace descend upon the disheartened soul and it shows no symptoms of reviving. . . . We, all of us, need encouragement to do good. The path of virtue, even when it is not uphill, is rough and stony and each day's journey is a little longer than our strength admits

of, only there are no means of shortening it. The twenty-four hours are the same to everybody except the idle, and to the idle they are thirty-six for weariness and dullness. You may love God and love Him truly and high motives may be before you; nevertheless, you may be quite conscious of being soon fatigued, nay, perhaps, of a normal lassitude growing with your years; and you must remember how especially the absence of sympathy tried you and how all things began to look like delusion because no one encouraged you in your work. Alas! how many noble souls have sunk under this not ignoble weariness. How many plans for God's glory have fallen to the ground which a bright look or a kind eye would have propped up! But, either because we were busy with our own work and never looked at that of others, or because we were jealous and looked coldly and spoke critically, we have not come with this facile succor to the rescue not so much of our brother as of our dearest Lord Himself. How many institutions for the comfort of the poor or the saving of souls have languished more for want of approbation than of money; and though sympathy is so cheap, the lone priest has struggled on till his solitude, his weariness and his lack of sympathy have almost blamelessly given way beneath the burden. Oh, what a wretched thing it is to be unkind! I think, with the thought of the Precious Blood, I can better face my sins at the last judgment than my unkindness, with all its miserable fertility of evil consequences. But, if we have no notion of the far-reaching mischief which unkindness does, so neither can we rightly estimate the good which kindnesses may do. Not so much as a kind action or a kind word, but the mere tone of voice may convey sympathy to a suffering heart in an instant and it is encouraged to do bravely the very thing that in despondency it had almost resolved to leave undone. That encouragement may be the first link in a new chain which, when its length is finished, shall be called final perseverance. . . .

Kindness supplies the place of praise; so, here is another work that it can do. Few men can do without praise and there are few

circumstances under which a man can be praised without injuring him. Some men can do without the praise of others because their own is so unfailing. Their vanity enables them to find self-praise sufficient. Vanity is the most comfortable of vices. The misfortune is that, nevertheless, it is a vice. Some try to do without praise and grow moody and critical which shows that their grace was not sufficient for their attempt. Some do without praise because they are all for God but alas! it would not occupy us long to take the census of that portion of the world's population. Most men must have praise. Everyone in authority knows this well enough. He has to learn to praise without seeming to praise. Now kindness has all the virtues of praise without its vices. When we are praised we are praised at our own expense. Kindness puts us to no expense while it enriches those who are kind to us. Praise always implies some degree of condescension and condescension is a thing intrinsically ungraceful, whereas kindness is the most graceful attitude one man can assume toward another. It is, in fact, the only sort of praise which does not injure, the only sort which is always and everywhere true, the only kind which those who are afraid of growing conceited may welcome safely.

No kind action ever stopped with itself. Fecundity belongs to kindness in its own right. One kind action leads to another. Our example is followed. The single act throws out roots in all directions . . . and its fertility is to be found chiefly in the person whom we have benefited. This is the greatest work which kindness does to others—that it makes them kind themselves. The kindest men are generally those who have received the greatest number of kindnesses. It does sometimes happen, according to the law which, in noble natures, produces good out of evil, that men who have had to feel the want of kindness are themselves lavishly kind when they have the power. But the general rule is that kindness makes men kind. As we become kind ourselves by practicing kindness, so the objects of our kindness, if they were kind before, learn now to be kinder and to be kind now if they were never so before. Thus, for all these reasons, there is no

better thing which we can do for others, than to be kind to them; and our kindness is the greatest gift they can receive, except the grace of God. . . .

We have seen what kindness does for the world. We have seen what it does for our neighbor. Now let us see how it blesses ourselves. Foremost among the common ways in which kind actions benefit ourselves may be mentioned the help they give us in getting clear of selfishness. . . . Kindness, partly from the pleasure which accompanies it, partly from the blessing it draws down upon itself, and partly from its similitude to God, tends rapidly to set into a well-informed habit. Selfishness is in no slight degree a point of view from which we regard things. Now does anything more effectually retard our spiritual growth? Selfishness must be put down or our progress will cease. A series of kind actions turned against it with playful courage and selfishness is, I will not say killed, but stunned; and that is a great convenience, though it is not the whole work accomplished. Perhaps we may never come to be quite unselfish. However, there is but one road toward that which is kindness and every step taken on that road is a long stride heavenward. . . .

Much grace goes along with kindness. Men grow kinder as they grow older. In like manner, as kindness in the natural world implies age, in the spiritual world it implies grace. It does not belong to the fervor of beginnings, but to the solidity of progress. It almost assures the exercise of humility. . . . It would be foolish to say that humility is an easy virtue. The very lowest degree of it is difficult to climb but kindness is the easiest road to humility and infallible as well as easy.

Kindness does so much for us that it would be almost easier to enumerate what it does not than to sum up what it does. It operates more easily in some characters than in others. But it works wondrous changes in all. It watches thoughts, controls words, and helps to unlearn early manhood's inveterate habit of criticism. It is astonishing to see how masterful it is in its influence over our dispositions and yet how gentle, quiet, con-

sistent, and successful. It makes us thoughtful and considerate. Detached acts of kindness may be the offspring of generous impulses, and he is mostly a good man whose impulses are good; but, in the long run, habitual kindness is the steadfast growth of generous deliberation.

Kindness is the high-tide of the soul's nobility and hides many an unseemly shallow which exposed its uninteresting sand in early days and will disclose itself once more by ripples when age comes upon us, unless we are of the fortunate few whose hearts get younger as their heads grow older. A kind man is a man who is never self-occupied. He is genial; he is sympathetic; he is brave. How shall we express in one word these many things which kindness does for us who practice it? It prepares us with an especial preparation for the paths of distinterested love of God. It is in reality a great part of the spiritual life. It is found in all its regions, and in all of them with different functions; and in none of them playing an inferior part. It is also a peculiar participation of the spirit of Jesus, which is itself the life of all holiness. It reconciles worldly men to religious people; and really, however contemptible worldly men are in themselves, they have souls to save and it were much to be wished that devout persons would make their devotion a little less angular and aggressive to worldly people, provided they can do so without lowering practice or conceding principle. . . . Poor human nature cannot do everything; and kindness is too often left uncultivated because men do not sufficiently understand its value. Men may be charitable, yet not kind; self-denying, yet not kind. If they would add a little common kindness to their uncommon graces, they would convert ten where they now only abate the prejudices of one. There is a sort of spiritual selfishness in devotion, which is rather to be regretted than condemned. I should not like to think it is unavoidable. Certainly its interfering with kindness is not unavoidable. It is only a little difficult and calls for watchfulness. . . .

Rightly considered, kindness is the grand cause of God in the world. Where it is natural, it must forthwith be supernaturalized.

Where it is not natural, it must be supernaturally planted. What is our life? It is a mission to go into every corner it can reach, and reconquer for God's beatitude His unhappy world back to Him. It is a devotion of ourselves to the bliss of the Divine Life by the beautiful apostolate of kindness.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Kind Thoughts

The thoughts of men are a world in themselves and each man's thoughts are a world to himself. Thus we all have an interior world to govern and he is the only real king who governs it effectually. There is no doubt that we are very much influenced by external things, and that our natural dispositions are in no slight degree dependent upon our education. Nevertheless, our character is formed within. It is manufactured in the world of our thoughts and there we must go to influence it. He who is master there is master everywhere. The fountains of word and action have their untrodden springs in the caverns of the world of thought. . . . Our thoughts are a more true measure of ourselves than our actions are. They are not under the control of human respect. They have no witnesses but God. They are not bound to keep within certain limits or observe certain properties. Religious motives alone can claim jurisdiction over them. . . . The contradiction which too often exists between our outward actions and our inward intentions is only to be detected in the realm of our thoughts whither none but God can penetrate, except by guesses which are not less offensive against charity because they happen to be correct. . . .

Actions have their external hinderances, while our thoughts better disclose to us our possibilities of good and evil. Of course there is a most true sense in which the conscientious effort to cure a fault is a better indication of our character than the fault we have not yet succeeded in curing. Nevertheless, we may die at

any moment; and when we die, we die as we are. Thus our thoughts tell us better than our actions can do what we shall be like the moment after death. Lastly, it is in the world of thought that we most often meet with God, walking as in the shades of ancient Eden. It is there we hear His whispers. It is there we perceive the fragrance of His recent presence. It is thence that the first vibrations of grace proceed. . . .

If a man habitually has kind thoughts of others, and that on supernatural motives, he is not far from being a saint. All his thoughts are kind and he does not checker them with unkindly ones. These men are rare. Kind thoughts are rarer than kind words or kind deeds. They imply a great deal of thinking about others without the thoughts being criticisms. Active-minded men are naturally most given to criticize and they are also the men whose thoughts are the most exuberant. Such men, therefore, must make kind thoughts a defense against self. By sweetening the fountain of their thoughts, they will destroy the bitterness of their judgments. . . .

Nothing deepens the mind so much as a habit of charity. Charity cannot feed on surfaces. Its instinct is always to go deeper. Roots are its natural food. A man's surfaces are always worse than his real depths. Self is the only person who does not improve on acquaintance. Our deepest views of life are doubtless very shallow ones; for, how little do we know of what God intends to do with His own world! . . .

No one who has a high opinion of himself finds his merits acknowledged according to his own estimate of them. His reputation, therefore, cannot take care of itself. He must push it, and a man who is pushing anything in the world is always unamiable because he is obliged to stand so much on the defensive. Every man who is habitually holding out for his rights makes himself the equal of his inferiors, even if he be a king. But the kind-thoughted man has no rights to defend, no self-importance to push. He thinks meanly of himself, and with so much honesty

that he thinks thus of himself with tranquility. He finds others pleasanter to deal with than himself; and others find him so pleasant to deal with that love follows him wherever he goes. . . .

Kindness is the occupation of our whole nature by the atmosphere and spirit of heaven. Nature cannot do the work itself nor can it do it with ordinary succors. Were there ever any consistently kind heathens? If so, they are in heaven now, for they must have been under the dominion of grace on earth. . . .

We ought to cultivate most sedulously the habit of kind interpretations. The habit of not judging others is one which it is very difficult to acquire, and which is generally not acquired till very late in the spiritual life. If men have ever indulged in judging others, the very sight of an action almost indeliberately suggests an internal commentary upon it. It has become so natural to them to judge, however little their own duties or responsibilities are connected with what they are judging, that the actions of others present themselves to the mind as in the attitude of asking a verdict from it. All our fellow men who come within reach of our knowledge (and for the most retired of us the circle is a wide one) are prisoners at the bar, and if we are unjust, ignorant, and capricious judges, it must be granted that we are indefatigable ones. There must be an end of this or it will end in everlasting banishment from God. The decree of the last judgment is absolute. It is this: the measure which we have meted out to others. As it is impossible all at once to stop judging and also impossible to go on judging uncharitably, we must pass through the intermediate stage of kind interpretations. Few men have passed beyond this to a habit of perfect charity which has blessedly stripped them of their ermine and their deeply-rooted judicial habits of mind.

Men's actions are very difficult to judge. Their real character depends in great measure on the motives which prompt them and these motives are invisible to us. Nobody can judge men but God, and we can hardly obtain a higher or more reverent view of God than that which represents Him to us as judging men

with perfect knowledge, unperplexed certainty, and undisturbed compassion. Kind interpretations are imitations of the merciful ingenuity of the Creator finding excuses for His creatures. . . .

The habit of judging is so nearly incurable that we must concentrate for a long while on keeping it in check; and this check is to be found in kind interpretations. We must come to esteem very lightly our sharp eye for evil on which we once prided ourselves as cleverness. We must look at our talent for analysis of character as a dreadful possibility of huge uncharitableness. It is the hardest talent of all to manage. We are sure to continue to say clever things so long as we continue to indulge in this analysis; and clever things are equally sure to be sharp and acid. It would be comparatively easy for us to be holy if we could always see the characters of our neighbors either in soft shade or with the kindly deceits of moonlight upon them. Of course we do not grow blind to evil; for thus we should speedily become unreal. But we must grow to something higher and something truer than a quickness in detecting evil. . . .

Have we not always found in our past experience that, on the whole, our kind interpretations were truer than our harsh ones? What mistakes have we not made in judging others! Have they not almost always been on the side of harshness? We have seen a thing as clear as day. It could have but one meaning. We have aroused our righteous indignation. All at once the whole matter is differently explained, and in some way so simple that we are lost in astonishment that we never should have thought of it ourselves. Always distrust very plain cases. Things that were dark begin to give light. What seemed to be opaque begins to be transparent. Things that everybody differed about now everybody sees in the same light, so natural and so obvious has the explanation been. How many times in life have we been wrong when we put a kind construction on the conduct of others? We shall not need our fingers to count those mistakes upon. . . .

While common sense convinces us of the truth of kind interpretations, common selfishness ought to open our eyes to their

wisdom and their policy. We must have passed through life very unobservantly if we have never perceived that a man is very much himself what he thinks of others. A man who was on a higher eminence before will soon, by harsh judgments of others, sink to the level of his own judgments. When you hear a man attribute meanness to another, you may be sure not only that the critic is an ill-natured man but that he has a similar element of meanness in himself or is fast sinking to it. Even a well-founded suspicion more or less degrades a man. His suspicion may be verified and he may escape some material harm by having cherished the suspicion but he is unavoidably the worse man for having entertained it. . . .

What does the doctrine of kind interpretations amount to? For most of us, living a new life in a new world. Our moral life would differ from what it is at present if we were habitually to put a kind interpretation on all we saw and heard, and habitually had kind thoughts of every one of whom we thought at all. See what an amount of bitterness we have about us. What is to become of it? It plainly cannot be taken into heaven. Where must it be left behind? We cannot put it off by the mere act of dying as we can put off a rheumatic limb, or a wasted lung, or diseased blood. It will surely be a long and painful process in the heats of purgatory; but we may be happy if mercy so abound that the weight of our bitterness shall not sink us deeper into the fire, into that depth from which no one ever rises to the surface more. But when we reach heaven, one very important feature of it will be the absence of all bitterness and criticism, and the way in which our expanded minds will be possessed with thoughts of the most tender and overflowing kindness. Thus, by cultivating kind thoughts we are in a very special way rehearsing for heaven. More than this, we are effectually earning heaven, for by God's grace we are imitating in our own minds that on which in the Divine Mind we rest all our hopes—merciful allowances, ingeniously favorable interpretations, thoughts of un-

mingled kindness, and all the inventions and tolerations of a supreme compassion.

Criticism is an element in our reputation and an item in our influence. We partly attract persons by it. We partly push principles by means of it. The practice of kind thoughts commits us to the surrender of all this. It makes us sacrifice successes at the moment they are within reach. Our conduct becomes a perpetual voluntary forfeiture of little triumphs. He who has ever struggled with a proud heart and bitter temper will perceive at once what innumerable and vast processes of spiritual combat all this implies, but it brings its reward also. It endows us with a marvelous facility in spiritual things. It opens and smooths the paths of prayer. It sheds a clear, stiff light over self-knowledge. It adds a peculiar delight to the exercise of faith. It enables us to find God easily.

The practice of kind thoughts is our main help to that complete government of the tongue which we all so much covet and without which the apostle says that all our religion is vain. The interior beauty of a soul through habitual kindness of thought is greater than words can tell. To such a man, life is a perpetual bright evening with all things calm and fragrant and restful. The dust of life is laid, and its fever cool. All sounds are softer as in the way of evening, and all sights are fairer and the golden light makes our enjoyment of earth a happy preparation for heaven.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Kind Words

The power of kind words is shown particularly in the destruction of prejudices, however inveterate they may have been. Surely we must all have experienced this ourselves. For a long time we have had prejudices against a person. They seem to have been extremely well-founded. We have a complete view of the whole case in our own minds. Some particular circumstances bring us

into connection with this man. We see nothing to disabuse us of our prejudices. There is not an approach to any kind of proof that we were mistaken in forming such a judgment or that we have exaggerated the matter. But kind words pass, and the prejudices thaw away. Right or wrong, there was some reason or show of reason for forming them, while there is neither reason nor show of reason for their departure. There is no logic in the matter, but a power above logic—the simple unassisted power of a few kind words. What has been said of prejudices applies equally to quarrels. In reality, an unforgiving heart is a rare monster. Most men get tired of the justest quarrels. Kind words will set right things that have gone most intricately wrong. . . . All quarrels probably rest on misunderstanding and only live by silence which stereotypes the misunderstanding. A misunderstanding which is more than a month old may generally be regarded as incapable of explanation. Renewed explanations become renewed misunderstandings. Kind words patiently uttered for long and without visible fruit are our only hope. They will succeed. They will not explain what has been misunderstood but they will do what is much better—make explanations unnecessary and so avoid the risk, which always accompanies explanations, of reopening old sores.

In removing prejudices and misunderstandings, kind words have a remedial power, but they can be productive also. . . . By their power of producing happiness, they have also a power of producing holiness and so of winning men to God.

Words have a power of their own both for good and evil which I believe to be more influential and energetic over our fellow men than even our actions. . . . Hence it is that an angry word rankles longer in the heart than any angry gesture, very often, even longer than a blow. So too an additional force belongs to kind words. They prepare men for conversion. They sanctify them. They produce entrance for wholesome counsels into their souls. . . . Oh, it would be worth going through fire and water to acquire the right and to find the opportunity of saying kind

words! . . . The occasions for this do not lie scattered over life at great distances from each other. They occur daily and are frequent in the day. . . .

Self-interest makes it comparatively easy for us to do that which we are well-paid for doing. The great price which everyone puts on a little kind word makes the practice of saying it still easier. Kindness to be perfect, to be lasting, must be a conscious imitation of God. Sharpness, bitterness, sarcasm, acute observation of motives, all these things disappear when a man is earnestly conforming himself to the image of Jesus Christ. . . . He who is not patient with converts to God will forfeit many of his own graces before he is aware. It is natural to pass from the facility of kind words to their reward. Is there any happiness in the world like the happiness of a disposition made happy by the happiness of others? There is no joy to be compared with it. The luxuries which wealth can buy, the rewards which ambition can attain, the pleasures of art and scenery, the abounding sense of health, and the exquisite enjoyment of mental creations are nothing to this pure and heavenly happiness where self is drowned in the blessedness of others. Yet this happiness follows close upon kind words and is their legitimate result. They soothe our own irritation. They charm away our cares. They draw us near to God. They produce in us a quiet restfulness like that which accompanies the consciousness of forgiven sin. They shed abroad the peace of God within our hearts. They appear to have a peculiar congeniality with the grace of contrition. Everything which makes us gentle has at the same time a tendency to make us contrite. Hence it is that seasons of sorrow are apt to be seasons of grace. This too is a huge reward. . . .

In some respects, a clever man is more likely to be kind than a man who is not clever because his mind is wider and takes in a broader range and is more capable of looking at things from different points of view. But there are other respects in which it is harder for a clever man to be kind in his words. He has a temptation, sometimes bordering on the irresistible, to say clever

things; and somehow, clever things are hardly ever kind things. There is a drop of acid in them and it seems as if that drop were exactly what genius had insinuated. Our Lord's words in the Gospels should be our model. If we may reverently say it, when we consider of what a sententious and proverbial character His words were, it is remarkable how little of epigram or sharpness there is in them. Of course the words of the Eternal Word are all of them heavenly mysteries, each one with the light and the seal of Divinity upon it. At the same time they are examples to us. There is something in genius which is analogous to a sting. Its sharpness, its speed, its wantonness, its pain, and its poison—genius has all of these as well as the sting. There are some men who make it a kind of social profession to be amusing talkers. One is sometimes overwhelmed with melancholy by their professional efforts to be entertaining. They are the bugbears of real conversation. . . .

There is also a grace of kind listening as well as a grace of kind speaking. Some men listen with an abstracted air which shows that their thoughts are elsewhere. Or they seem to listen, but, by wide answers and irrelevant questions, show that they have been occupied with their own thoughts as being more interesting, at least by their estimation, than what you have been saying. Some listen with a kind of importunate ferocity which makes you feel that you are being put on trial and your auditor expects beforehand that you are going to tell him a lie, or to be inaccurate, or to say something which he will disapprove and you must mind your expressions. Some interrupt and will not hear you to the end. Some hear you to the end and then forthwith begin to talk to you about a similar experience which has befallen themselves, making your case only an illustration of their own. Some, meaning to be kind, listen with such a determined, lively, violent attention that you are at once made uncomfortable and the charm of conversation is at an end. Many persons whose manners stand the test of speaking, break down under the trial of listening. Kind listening is often an act of most delicate

interior mortification and is a great assistance toward kind speaking.

Next to clever speeches, a second difficulty in the way of kind words is that of repressing vexations at certain times and in certain places. Each man meets with peculiar characters who have a specialty, often quite inexplicable, of irritating him. They always come at the wrong time, say the most inopportune things, and make the most unfortunate choice of topics of conversation. Their presence has always something intrusive about it. You may admire, respect, even like the persons, yet you give out sparks if they touch you, and explode if they rub against you. This is only one example of the species of vexation which it is difficult to repress in our social intercourse, and which it is the office of the spirit of kindness to allay.

The unselfishness of speedily and gracefully distracting ourselves from self is also very difficult to practice. A man comes to us with an imaginary sorrow when we are bowed to the earth with a real one. Or he speaks to us with a loud voice and metallic laugh of robust health, when our nerves are all shrinking up with pain and our whole being quivering like a mimosa with excruciating sensitiveness. Or he comes to pour out the exuberance of happiness into our hearts which are full of gloom and his brightness is a reproach, sometimes almost a menace to our unhappiness. Or we are completely possessed with some responsibility, harrassed by some pecuniary difficulty, or haunted by some tyrannical presentiment of evil, and yet we are called upon to throw ourselves into some ridiculous little embarrassment, some fictitious wrong, or some shadow of a suffering for which another claims our sympathy. Here is grand material for sanctification. Nevertheless, such materials are hard to work up in practice. It is weary work cleaning old bricks to build a new house with. These are difficulties but we must push on to reach heaven. . . .

A kind-worded man is a genial man and geniality is power. No one was ever corrected by a sarcasm; crushed, perhaps, if the sarcasm was clever enough,—but drawn nearer to God, never.

. . . Without geniality no solid reform was ever made. But, if there are a thousand things in the world to reform, there are tens of thousands of people to convert. Satire will not convert men. Hell threatened very kindly is more persuasive than a biting truth about a man's false position. A genial man is both an apostle and an evangelist; an apostle because he brings men to Christ; an evangelist because he portrays Christ to men.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Kind Actions

If we look back on the last twenty or thirty years, it is amazing to consider the number of kind actions which have been done to us. Indeed, we feel that those which we remember are hardly so numerous as those we have forgotten—forgotten not through ingratitude but because of the distractions of life and the shortness of memory. . . . Now, every one of these kind acts has doubtless done us a certain amount of spiritual good. If they did not make us better at the time, they prepared the way for our becoming better and made an impression which we never suspected and yet was ineffaceable. . . . Let us think how little we have deserved these kind actions. There is no one who has not received tenfold more kindness himself than he has shown to others. These kind actions have been to us like importunate angels! From how many evils have they not rescued us! To how much good they have encouraged us! We can hardly tell what we should have been had we been treated one whit less kindly than we have been. . . . We are indeed very far from what we ought to be now. But it is frightening to think what we should have been had parents, friends, nurses, masters, servants, schoolfellows ,enemies, been less kind than they have been. All through life kindness has been bridling the devil that was within us. Feeling what we ourselves owe to the kindness of others, are we not bound, as far as lies in our power, to be putting everyone else, on all sides of us, under similarly blessed obligations? Easiness

is the rule and difficulty the exception. When kindness does call for an effort, how noble and how self-rewarding is the sacrifice! We always gain more than we lose. . . .

The very world, unkindly as it is, looks at kindness through a glass which multiplies as well as magnifies. This fallacy, however, confers upon kind actions a real power. The amount of kindness bears no proportion to the effect of kindness. The least kind action is taller than the hugest wrong. The weakest kindness can lift a heavy weight. It reaches far and travels swiftly. Nobody is kind to one person at once, but to many persons in one. What a beautiful entanglement of charity we get ourselves into by doing kind things!

A kind action is not short-lived. The doing of it is only the beginning of it. Years of estrangement can hardly take the odor out of a kind action. Hatred truly has a chemistry of its own by which it can turn kind actions into the choicest food. But, after all, hatred is an uncommon thing as well as a brutal one; that is to say, comparatively uncommon. Whereas, it is not uncommon for a man at the end of a half-century to do a kind action because one was done to him fifty years ago. . . . There is a pathetic sweetness about gratitude. It is a pathos which is very humbling, but very invigorating also. It may be said that all this implies a very unsupernatural view of the spiritual life and lays undue stress on what are almost natural virtues; that there is too much of common sense in it and too little of mystical theology. I might content myself with replying that a man cannot write on more than one subject at once nor can he bring in the whole ascetical doctrine when he is illustrating only one portion of it. I can only answer by pleading guilty of the charge, and refusing to be ashamed of my guilt. When we read the lives of the saints or ponder on the teaching of mystical books, we shall surely have no difficulty in admitting that we ourselves are but beginners or men of very low attainments in the matter of perfection. As such, we are liable to two mistakes: I hardly know whether to call them temptations or delusions. The first is to think too little

of external things. I am not accusing you of paying too much attention to the cultivation of an interior spirit. But what I mean is that beginners like to turn their eye away from outward conduct to more hidden processes of their own spiritual experiences. If we allow a beginner to choose his own subject for particular examination of conscience, he will almost always choose some very delicate and imperceptible fault, the theater of which is almost wholly within or some refined form of self-love whose metamorphoses are exceedingly difficult either to detect or control. He will not choose his temper or his tongue, or his love of nice dishes or some unworthy habit which is disagreeable to those around him. Yet this is the rule of Saint Ignatius; and surely no one will accuse him of not cultivating an interior spirit. This then is the first of the two mistakes which I attribute to men of low attainments. They affect those parts of the spiritual life that lie on the borders of the mystical theology and do justice neither to the common things of faith nor to the regulations of outward conduct. This leads to hardness of heart, to spiritual pride and to self-righteousness. It has a peculiar power to neutralize the operations of grace and to reduce our spirituality to a matter of words and feelings. A man will remain unimproved for years who travels upon this path.

The second mistake consists in giving way to an attraction toward what is too high for us. It is not that we divide things into outward and inward, and exaggerate the latter. But we divide them into high and commonplace and are inclined almost to despise the latter. We fasten with a sort of diseased eagerness upon the exceptional practices of the saints. Peculiarities have a kind of charm for us. We try to force ourselves to a thirst for suffering when we have hardly grace enough for the quiet endurance of a headache. We turn to the Four Last Things as subjects of prayer hardly suited to our state of disinterested love. We skip like antelopes over the purgative way, as if none but the herbage of the illuminative or the delicate flowers of the unitive

way were food delicate enough for us. In a word, we traffic with exceptions rather than with rules. Hence the common moral virtues, the ordinary motives of religion, the duties of our state of life, our responsibilities toward others, the usual teaching of sermons and spiritual books are all kept in the background. We are too well instructed to speak evil of them, or to show them contempt; but we treat them with respectful neglect. Thus our spiritual life becomes a sort of elegant selfish solitude, a temple reared to dainty delusions, a fastidious and exclusive worship of self. No saint ever went along this road. We can only reach the delicate truths of mysticism through the commonplace sincerity of asceticism. We are never likely to be so high in the spiritual life as when we seem to be just like anybody else. The grace to be indistinguishable from the good people around us is a greater grace than that which visibly marks us off from their practices or attainments.

There is a very real connection between the practice of kindness on supernatural motives and the highest departments of the spiritual life. Indeed, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of kindness as an ally in our invisible warfare. Naturalists say of the ant that the most surprising part of its instinct is its genius for extemporaneousness. In other words, it almost puts reason to shame by the promptitude with which it acts under totally new circumstances, its inventiveness in meeting with difficulties of which it can have had no previous experience, its ingenuity in changing the use of its tools, its power of instantaneous divination as to how it shall act in unexpected conjunctures, and its foreseeing judgment in hardly ever having to make an experiment or to try two ways of doing a thing. Now there is something very like this in kindness. No position ever seems new to it, no difficulty unforeseen. It appears to be dispensed from the necessity of deliberating. It follows the lightning-like changes of self-love, or of the tempter, with a speed as lightning-like as their own. It sees through all stratagems. It is

forever extemporizing new methods of defense and new varieties of attack. It always has light enough to work by because it is luminous itself.

Kind actions go upon unselfish motives and therefore tend to form a habit of disinterestedness in us which prepares us for the highest motives of divine love. They also catch us up into the regions of sacrifice. Like God's goodness, they are constantly occupied where there is no hope of payment or return. In like manner, as God acts evermore for His own glory, so kind actions, when they are habitual, must very frequently be done for Him alone. It is their instinct to be hidden, like the instinct of His Providence. Nay, God often rewards them by arranging that they shall be unrequited and so look only to Him as Himself their recompense. . . .

It may not be out of place to lay down a few rules for the doing of kind actions. When they have to be done with effort, it is unkind not to keep the effort out of view. At the same time, so that our humility may not be disquieted, we must bear in mind that the being done with effort is no just cause for disheartenment. We should never repeat to others our kind actions. If we do, their heavenly influence over ourselves goes at once. When persons begin to thank us, we should playfully stop their thanks, but not stiffly or unreally. There are some men who would feel awkward and uncomfortable if they were not allowed to pour out their feelings. Such men we must not check. It is part of the discernment of good manners to find out who they are, and the perfection of good manners to be natural and simple under the operation of being praised. Being praised puts us for the most part in a ludicrous position. Either it mortifies us by a sense of inferiority, or it makes us suspicious by a feeling of disproportion, or it unseasonably awakes our sense of humor, which is always in proportion to the honest seriousness of those who are praising us. The fact is that very few people know how to praise, and fewer still know how to take it. We should never dwell upon our kind actions in our own minds. God is in them.

They have been operations of grace. When we are tempted to be complacent about them, let us think of the sanctity of God and be ashamed. Let us dwell on His attribute of magnificence and be especially devout to it. We shall thus keep ourselves within the limits of our own littleness, and even feel comfortable in them.

Kind suffering is a form of kind action with peculiar rubrics of its own. But if all kindness needs grace, kind suffering needs it a hundredfold. Of a truth, those are rare natures which know how to suffer gracefully, and in whose endurance there is a natural beauty which simulates, and sometimes seems even to surpass what is supernatural. With the Christian, kind suffering must be almost wholly supernatural. It is a region in which grace must be despotic—so despotic as hardly to allow nature to dwell in the land. There is a harmonious fusion of suffering and gentleness effected by grace which is one of the most attractive features of holiness. . . . What is more beautiful than considerateness for others when we ourselves are unhappy? It is a grace made out of a variety of graces; and yet, while it makes a deep impression on all who come within the sphere of its influence, it is a very hidden grace. It is part of those deep treasures which the world can seldom rifle.

To be subject to low spirits is a sad liability. Yet, to a vigorous manly heart it may be a very complete sanctification. What can be more unkind than to communicate our low spirits to others, to go about the world poisoning the fountains of joy? Have I more light because I have managed to involve those I love in the same gloom as myself? Is it not pleasant to see the sun shining on the mountains, even though we have none down in our valley? Oh, the littleness and the meanness of that sickly appetite for sympathy which will not let us keep our tiny sorrows to ourselves! We hardly know in all this whether to be more disgusted with the meanness, or more indignant at the selfishness, or more sorrowful at the sin. The thoughts of the dying mother are all concentrated on her new-born child. It is a beautiful emblem of

unselfish holiness. So let us hide our pains and sorrows. But, while we hide them, let them also be spurs within us to urge us on to all manner of overflowing kindness and sunny humor to those around us. When the very darkness within us creates a sunshine around us, then has the spirit of Jesus taken possession of our souls.

Social contact has something irritating in it even when it is kindliest. Something goes wrong daily. . . . It is difficult even for sympathy not to exasperate. What a field for sanctification all this opens up to us! Then there is another sort of sweetness under God's visitations; and this shows itself especially in taking all the burden we can off others. For the fact is that everybody's cross is shared by many. No one carries his own cross wholly. At least, such crosses are very rare. I am not quite sure that they exist. Now, kind suffering makes us habitually look rather at what others feel of our crosses than at what we feel of them ourselves. We see our own crosses on other people's shoulders, and overwhelm them with kindness accordingly. It is not we who have been tossing wakeful all night that are the sufferers, but the poor nurse who has been fighting all night against the sleep of health by our bedside and with only partial success. . . . This is the turn of mind which kindness in suffering gives us. Who will say it is not a most converting thing? But then it must develop itself gracefully. We must do all this unobtrusively. Hence it is that the saints keep silence in suffering, for the mere knowledge of what they suffer is itself a suffering to those who love them. But suffering is a world of miracles. It would fill a book to say all that might be said about kindness in suffering.

Perhaps we might better have called kindness the spirit of Jesus. . . . But you will say, perhaps, "After all, it is a very little virtue, very much a matter of temperament, and rather an affair of good manners than of holy living." Well, I will not argue with you. The grass of the fields is better than the cedars of Lebanon. It feeds more, and it rests the eye better—that thymy, daisy-eyed carpet, making earth sweet and fair and homelike. Kindness is

the turf of the spiritual world, whereon the sheep of Christ feed quietly beneath the Shepherd's eye.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

The Seed-Time of Life

Childhood is a time of endless learning. It learns at play as well as at school. Its lessons hardly teach it more than its idleness. It observes without knowing that it observes, and imitates without suspecting that it is not original. It is the strangest mixture of the restless and the passive, always moving, yet always brooding also. There are few men who will ever in after-life be half so contemplative as they were amidst the changeful and capricious activities of childhood. There are many harvests in a lifetime, but there is only one seed-time; and all the crops are sown in seeming confusion at once, yet come up in an orderly succession which betokens law not uninfluenced by circumstances. After-life is the theater on which childhood produces its spectacles one after another, like so many dramas whose lightness or sadness, beauty or harshness, tell recognizable tales of birthplace and its scenery, of early schools with their dark and bright, of the impress of a father's mind, or the moulding of a mother's skillful love, or the grave touches of a brother's affectionate influence, or the ineffaceable memories of an idolatrous sister's tender partisanship. But, as life goes on, it is, above all things, the father's influence which manifests itself more and more. The voice takes his tone, the gait his peculiarity. Many little ways unconsciously develop themselves, which have never been remarked in past years, and can now be hardly an intentional imitation of one who has been in his grave for a quarter of a century. The old family home is renewed and they that remember old times look on with smiles and tears, both of which are at once painful and pleasant, because they raise the dead and put new life and color into memories that were fading away in gray time.

Now all this may be applied to the subject of religion. What

childhood is to after-life, so far as this world is concerned, this life is to the life to come. We are always learning, and learning more than we suspect. If we are earnestly striving to serve God, we are observing Him when we do not think of it. Our likeness to Him is growing, like a family likeness in a child, sleeping or waking; and its progress is hardly noted. We are only conscious of it at intervals. Our nature is becoming secretly and painlessly supernaturalized, even at moments when the painful efforts of mortification may happen to be comparatively suspended. God's ways are passing into ours though, for the present, it is all under the surface; and not unfrequently appearances are even the other way. Sometimes, as we advance in the spiritual life, we are taken by surprise at finding how much more deeply heavenly principles have sunk into us than we had supposed, and how almost intuitively we put ourselves on God's side, take His view of things, and even, in a far-off way, imitate what we may reverently term His style of action. Long daily intimacy with our Heavenly Father is beginning to tell upon us. Habits of child-like reverence are almost implicitly habits of filial imitation. Great results follow even on this side of the grave; but surely much greater ones will follow on the other. The degree of our likeness to God there may depend more than we suppose on the secret undergrowth of that likeness here. As childhood's best harvests are those which come latest in life, so may it be that our imitation of God may not merely secure our bliss hereafter, but may give a character to our blessedness, and exercise no little influence over it forever. At any rate, the mere observation of God is of immense importance to our sanctification. To see Him at work, even without our endeavor to imitate Him, is in itself a sanctifying process, and one which, as a matter of fact, will never rest in itself, but sooner or later will issue in real imitation. Principles of celestial beauty grow into us, and mould us with quiet vehemence, just as exquisite models make artists; and time and love are all the while doing a joint work deeper down in us than we can see ourselves. To watch God seems to put a new nature into us. We

grow like Him by seeing Him, even in the twilight of this arctic world. We turn away from the sight of Him for a moment, and lo! all things look unbeautiful because God is not there. We have already watched Him bring forth His decrees from their eternal hiding-place in His mind, and gently lead them to execution; let us now see how He will fling open the doors of His own concealment, and take visible possession of His kingdom. . . . God's way of manifesting Himself after being so long invisible—nay, from the first invisible—invisible until now. A filial creature can hardly see his Heavenly Father's behavior in critical circumstances, and at a solemn time, and not himself grow heavenly thereby.

—Bethlehem

How to Overcome Temptations

How are we to overcome temptations? Cheerfulness is the first thing, cheerfulness the second, and cheerfulness the third. The devil is chained. He can bark, but he cannot bite, unless we go up to him and let him do so. We must be of good courage. The power of temptation is in the fainting of our own hearts. Confidence in God is another spiritual weapon, the more potent because no one can have confidence in God who has not the completest diffidence in himself. God's cause is ours; for temptation is more really the devil's wrath against God who has punished him, than against us, whom he only envies. Our ruin is important to him only as it is a blow at God's glory. Thus God is bound to us, as it were, as it is for His sake that we are thus persecuted. We may be sure, indeed we know infallibly, that we shall never be tried beyond our strength. Prayer, especially ejaculatory prayer, is another obvious means of victory, together with mortification and the frequenting of the sacraments, which are all of them wells of supernatural fortitude.

Examination of conscience must help us to detect the weak and vulnerable parts of our nature; and then we must exercise

ourselves in acts contrary not only to our peculiar infirmities, but also to our besetting temptations. We must avoid idleness, and crush beginnings. We must not speak of temptations indiscriminately to persons who have no right to know anything about them, nor even to our spiritual friends. It gives no real relief, and it feeds the ideas. Neither must we be cast down if our director treats our temptations more lightly than we think they deserve. What is the good of speaking to him at all about them, if we are not going to obey his rules and adopt his view and follow his advice?

In times of temptation we must be very careful not to retrench any of our spiritual exercises, a line of conduct for which the evil one may suggest very specious reasons. We have need of all our strength at that moment; and we never know to which of our ordinary exercises God attaches His grace. It would have been better for the apostles to have struggled through a drowsy, dry, distracted prayer than to have simply gone to sleep in the Garden of Gethsemane. We must remember also that all our spiritual exercises are less prompt and pleasant when we are under temptations because we are teased and puzzled by them. Hence nature is more likely to suggest the abridgement or discontinuance of some of them on the ground of their being useless and spiritless. But although things are established by the mouth of two witnesses, those two must not be the devil and the human spirit. We must also be cautious not to change our purposes at such times. The dust and smoke of the battle hang over us and darken all things. It is not a time for us to see God's will about changes and vocations. His will just then is that we resist the evil, and therefore that is the single thing for us to do. Nay, we must beware even of any new good that makes its appearance, knocks at the door of our heart, or puts itself ready-made into our hands at such a season. St. Ignatius long since warned us of a family of temptations which present themselves under the disguise of good. God would not send us the good then or in that way. His will, once more, is that we should resist the evil. The

good will keep if it be real good; and He will send us peaceable times when we can calmly and deliberately take it upon ourselves.

—*Growth in Holiness*

Temptations are the Raw Material of Glory

Temptations are the raw material of glory; and the management of them is as great a work as the government of an empire, and requires a vigilance as incessant and as universal. It is a startling thing to look out into the world and study its ways, and then to think that God was made Man and died upon the cross for its redemption. But it is equally startling to look into the lives of good men and examine their dispositions, and then to put one of the maxims of the Gospel alongside of them. At this very hour thousands of souls are earnestly complaining to God of their temptations, and hundreds of confessionals are filled with whispered and impatient murmurings against the vehemence or the perseverance of them. Yet St. James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations." It is plain, therefore, that we either do not know or do not always bear in mind the true nature and character of temptations. They are nearly as multitudinous as our thoughts, and our only victory over them is through persisting courage, and an indomitable spirit of cheerfulness. The arrows of temptations fall harmless and blunted from a gay heart, which has first of all cast itself so low in its humility that nothing can cast it lower. Be joyous, or, to use scripture words, "rejoice, and again I say rejoice," and you will not heed your temptations, neither will they harm you.

But let us obtain a clear idea of the nature of temptations. It seems an obvious thing to say that in the first place they are not sins; yet in nine cases out of ten our unhappiness comes from not discerning this fact. Some defilement seems to come from the touch of a mere temptation; and at the same time it reveals to us, as nothing else does, our extreme feebleness and constant need

of grace and of very great grace. We are like men who do not know how sore their bruises are until they are pressed, and then we exaggerate the evil. So when temptation presses our fallen and infirm nature, the tenderness is so sensible and so acute that it gives us at once the feeling of a wound or a disease. Yet we must be careful always to distinguish between a sin and a temptation.

Temptations are either in ourselves, or outside of us, or partly the one and partly the other. Those from within ourselves arise, either from our senses, which are free and undisciplined, or from our passions, which are wild and uncorrected. Those which are outside assail us either by delighting us, as riches, honors, attachments and distractions, or by attacking us as the demons do; and those which partake of the nature of both possess the attractions of both. In one sense, however, all temptations consist in an alliance between what is within us and what is without us. As I have said before, we must not put too much upon the devil; yet neither on the other hand must we be without fear of him, or without a true and scriptural estimate of his awful and malignant office. He goes about seeking whom he may devour. He is a roaring lion, when the roar will affright us, and a noiseless serpent when success is to be ensnared by secrecy. He has reduced the possibilities and probabilities of our destruction to a science which he applies with the most unrelenting vigor, the most masterly intelligence, almost unfailing power, and with the most ubiquitous variety. If it were not for the thought of grace, its abundance and its sovereignty, we should not dare to contemplate the ways and means of the Satanic kingdom.

Yet nowhere is it a mere fight between man and the devil. Wherever temptation is, there God is also. There is not one which His will has not permitted, and there is not a permission which is not an act of love as well. He has given His whole wisdom to each temptation. He has calculated its effects, and often diminishes its power. He has weighed and measured each by the infirmity of each tempted soul. He has deliberately con-

templated the consequences of each, in union with its circumstances. The minutest feature has not escaped His judgment. All this while the devil is passive and powerless. He cannot lay a finger on the child until its loving Father has prescribed the exact conditions, and has forewarned the soul by His inspirations, and forearmed it with proportionable succors of grace. Nothing is at random, as if temptations were hurrying here and there, like the bullets in the air of a battlefield. Moreover, each temptation has its own crown prepared for it, if we correspond to grace and are victorious. I do not know any picture of God more affecting, or more fatherly, than the vision of Him which faith gives us in His assiduous solicitudes and paternal occupations while we are being tempted. "Where wert Thou, Lord, while I was being tempted?" cried the saint of the desert. "Close to you, my son, all the while," was the tender reply. As men feel sorrow to be at times a privilege, because it draws them into the sympathies of their superiors, so is it a joy to be tempted because it occupies God so intensely and so lovingly with our little interests and cares. The highest saint in heaven can never attain to love God, as He loves a soul struggling with temptations.

—*Growth in Holiness*

Generosity

Theory is not much without practice; yet without a good theory practice for the most part is not itself worth much, for it is neither fruitful nor enduring. If this is true in most things, it is especially so in the spiritual life. . . . Having then observed in ourselves certain signs of progress, been put upon our guard against certain pretended signs, and seen what we can do to cultivate the promise we have observed, it is desirable that we should clearly understand in what spirit it is that we commit ourselves to God, and pledge ourselves to serve Him. A clear idea is a great help to us, and consistency is no slight part of perseverance. Let us then thoroughly understand what we are about,

what we are promising, what sort of a life it will lead to, and what God may reasonably expect of us after our own voluntary professions.

Without liberty of spirit we can never be perfect, and there is no true or safe liberty of spirit which does not follow as a consequence from the spirit in which we serve God, and the only right spirit in which to serve Him is one of self-sacrifice and generosity. When we have mastered this and turned it into practice, we are already miles beyond where we were before. People never go far enough, unless they start with a clear view of how far they ought to go.

There are many difficulties in life. Some men have more, some less. But the most fearful of all no one can get rid of, namely, that of having to deal with God. . . . Contrast His reality with our untruth, His power with our weakness, His law with our disobedience. Enumerate His known perfections, remembering that there is no great or small with Him because of His immensity and completeness. Analyze His tremendous sanctity and meditate separately on every element of it. . . . On our side there is a multitudinous fertility, day and night, of thought, word, work, omission and intention: on His side, the noting of all this, the stern requisition of an invariably pure intention, the strict account, the severity of the punishment, the eternity of the doom, and the infallible inevitableness of it all.

His court in heaven we could not see and live, because of its radiant purity. The strong angels tremble and are shaken; our Lady is all abased; and the Sacred Heart of our Lord Himself is flooded with reverential fear.

Along the line of Sacred History, there gleam like lights the dreadful chastisements which God has inflicted on venial sins. Moses and David, the man of God whom the lion slew, Oza who upheld the swaying Ark—these examples are overwhelming disclosures of the sanctity of God; and the notable thing is that what seems to anger God in these faults is the want of wholeness of heart with Him. Let us look at our own past lives by this

light, and have we not cause to tremble; or even at our present practice, and have we a right to be without fear? What a thought for us that He knows at this moment how we are to stand to all eternity, what pains we are to endure, or what bliss we shall enjoy. It is enough to take away our breath to know that this is known, even though we are still free. Surely nothing can be conceived more awful than having to deal with God.

What then follows from all this? Undoubtedly nothing less than these five simple truths.

1. That His service is our most important, if not our sole work. . . .

2. That the spirit in which we serve Him should be entirely without reserve. . . .

3. That our ruling passion should be horror of sin, even venial sin, and unworthy imperfections. . . .

4. That we should avoid, as if it were sacrilege, any slovenliness in our dealings with God. . . .

5. That the only one fact of any special importance to us is whether we are honestly serving God or not.

Shall we be saved or not! The whole of life's solemnity and seriousness resolves itself into that one overwhelming doubt. We should have nothing so much at heart as this. Nay rather we should have nothing at heart but this. How dead to self we should soon become, under the shadow of this universal life-long question! Yet how does the case really stand? A little wrong, a trifling injustice, an insulting word, a piquing of our self-love and personal vanity stirs us more effectually and interests us more really than the chances of being lost or saved. And yet we are aiming at a devout life! And yet we dream we are serving God!

It is plain, without speaking of high things or of fervent devotions, that merely to carry out in the service of God these five self-evident truths, we must serve Him in a spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice. But the spirit of generosity may be looked at in two ways; as it exists in our own hearts, and as it actually inspires our conduct. We are thinking of it just now in the first

point of view. Its victory over our external actions is a work of time and combat. It will not only be long before it is achieved, but in point of fact it never will be achieved to the extent which we ourselves see to be possible. What I want to impress upon you is that even as a theory it is of immense utility. Unless we see clearly what it is to be generous with God, and have steadfastly determined to be so, there is no likelihood that the slightest degree of generosity will actuate our external conduct. What we want in our present position is that we shall not consciously at least have any reserves with God, that we shall set no definable bounds either to our love of Him or to our sacrifice for Him, that we shall not fix our eye on any imaginary point of future perfection and say that when we have arrived at that we shall be content, that as we read or hear of the states and stages of the spiritual life and the practices of courageous mortification, we shall never feel of any of them, that it will never be a practical matter to us. You see I am putting it all in the negative. I am not saying that you shall positively determine at some future time to do this or to suffer that. I should not wish it. I am only saying that you must not exclude as impossible or impracticable any amount of perfection. You must have no reserve. You have nothing to do with the future. You have to follow the present grace, and then the grace which shall present itself next, and then the grace after that, and so on, till God draws you to a nearness to Himself which it would frighten you now even to picture to yourself. You must abandon yourself to grace and follow its lead. But unless you see the reasonableness of this, and make up your mind to it steadily beforehand, you are quite sure not to do it. This is what I mean by having a good theory of generosity. If you have not the theory now, you will never have the practice hereafter.

Undeniable as the common sense of this may be, corrupt nature will often plead eloquently against it. Consequently this theory must not be merely a loving instinct in the heart or an habitual resolution in the will. You must verify it as an intellec-

tual conviction. You must have persuaded yourself of it. If not, when temptation comes, you will tremble from head to foot with indecision, and end by fainting. It is well therefore to make it a frequent subject of meditation. You must accustom yourself to true views about the Gospel. You must see that, all through it is a religion of suffering, of mortification, of self-sacrifice, of consuming love, of self-forgetting zeal, of self-crucifying union, in a word, it is a religion of the Cross and the Crucified. You must get well into you the truth so unpalatable to nature that self-denial is of its essence, and that it must be daily self-denial, not only that we may be perfect, but even that we may be our dear Lord's disciples.

In truth, Jesus is our model, of whom the Holy Ghost bade the apostle say that He pleased not Himself. Fix your eyes on this Divine Exemplar; familiarize yourself with the mysteries of His Sacred Humanity, until the spirit of them passes into you. Learn the secret of His Infancy, of His eighteen years Hidden Life, of His three years Ministry, of His week's Passion, of His forty days of Risen Life. Where is there any self? Is not all sacrifice in detail? Is not all unreserved generosity for the glory of His Father, and the perishing souls of men? This unreservedness is the grand characteristic of the Incarnation. Look at His Passion. Take His Divinity for the first point of your meditation on it. How did He use it? He restrained it from consoling Him; He let it strengthen Him that He might suffer more, even beyond the ordinary limits of human endurance; it was all the while actually giving physical strength and vigor to His executioners to torment Him with, and its concurrence was the weight and force of the burning lash. Then look at His soul. In it He foresaw His passion all His life long, so that it was a fear and a suffering of three-and-thirty years. Gethsemane was, as it were, the crucifixion of His Soul, as Calvary was of His Body; and all through the Passion His Soul was pierced by woes and humiliations which have never been surpassed or equalled for continuity, variety, and keenness. Then cast an eye upon His Sacred Body. Nothing is held back.

Head, Hands, Feet, Eyes, Mouth, Back, Heart, all have their own torture, all contribute their own peculiar agony to the grand Redeeming Sacrifice. His Blood is shed quite wastefully, over the olive roots of Gethsemane, on the pavement of Jerusalem, into the braided thongs and the knotted lashes, all along the way of the Cross, up to Calvary, and on the holy wood of the Cross, and it is shed until the emptied Heart has not another drop to give. Now compare all this with our own mean reserve and half-heartedness! Toward God what scanty prayers, cold Communions, what heartless confessions, careless examens, what human respect, what grievous sins! Toward our neighbor, how selfish in action, how unkind in word, how censorious in thought! Toward ourselves, how indulgent, how conceited, what pampering of our body, what worship of our will!

The great lesson of the Crucifix is whole-heartedness with God, the spirit of joyous abandonment and generous sacrifice. We may get a clearer idea of it if we look at it from another point of view. We are quite capable of conceiving a man, a saint he could not be, exempt from all actual sin, and observing to the full all the commandments to the letter, and yet without generosity to God. It is, of course, a theological impossibility; but we are capable of conceiving it. This sinless man might, without breaking any commandment, be occasionally dull-hearted with God, grudging Him heroic service and counsels which did not oblige. He might be sometimes inclined to bargain with God and to think he had now done quite as much as was discreet. Now and then he might give way to the feeling that his confident life was irksome, because of the unwearied and unremitting sacrifice which it entailed. At intervals he might even have fits of lukewarmness, in matters plainly short of sin. He might look on Jesus without any glow of enthusiasm, and his acts of love might up to a certain point be remiss. All this is possibly and imaginably consistent with entire sinlessness. Yet what is the disposition of this unsinning monster but the portrait of a devil or something very like it? And why, except for the absence of all generosity

with God? It is just this which stamps, not the unchristian, but the antichristian character upon it.

—*Growth in Holiness*

The Desire of Perfection

The desire of perfection is, as we have already seen, a gift from God, and a great gift; and a generous and earnest pursuit of virtue is necessary to perfection. Yet we must not be inordinately attached, either to the desire or the pursuit. If it is God's will to hold us back, we must be content to be held back. The goodness of a thing is no justification of an unruly eagerness in acquiring it. The eagerness of the pursuit will more than counterbalance the blessing of the acquisition. Our falls are permitted. Our share in them must be wiped away by cheerful, hopeful sorrow. The rest God will look to, and we must be at peace.

There is also this other disadvantage in the opposite line of conduct. Discouragement necessarily brings with it a greediness for consolation. The more we are disquieted, the more we fly to what will solace and soothe. And this is bringing self back again into everything, besides unnerving us for genuine struggle, and giving us a disrelish for mortification. Consolations from creatures never really help, but very often hinder; and an appetite for them is a bad augury of progress.

But in the spiritual life there is never a permission without a caution, never a relaxation without a saving clause against laxity. So in this case we must be careful to distinguish hopefulness from self-conceit. To be quiet under our faults is not to be free and easy with them; and cheerfulness is a very different thing from vanity. But how to discern between the two? Hope implies a certain amount of doubt, and that again implies fear: so that when we hope in time to advance beyond the circle of particular faults, we have some, but a subordinate, fear, that possibly we may not succeed. That fear is plainly self-distrust, and it is subordinate, else it would be discouragement. Conceit has no fear,

because it has no doubt, and no hope, because it does not contemplate its success as being in any way uncertain. So that self-distrust is one test by which we can distinguish hopefulness from conceit. A confidence in God more than equalling our distrust of self is another sign. Conceit trusts in itself; and in its reckonings calculates as a right what humility sees to be a grace. A third test is to be found in the gradual growth of the supernatural in our feelings, motives, and desires. If we look more to God, if we lean more on sacraments, if we prefer the divine will to our own spiritual advancement, then we may be sure that our quietness with our faults is hopefulness, and not conceit.

The whole question comes to this. There are two views of growth in grace, the self-improvement view and the will-of-God view. In these views—for what is more operative than a view?—is the root of all the error and of all the wisdom of the matter. If a man puts self-improvement before him as the end of life, almost every step he takes will be wrong. If he works away at himself, as a sculptor finishes off a statue, he will get more out of proportion, and bring out more black marks and gray blotches, the longer he chisels. Not a motive will be right, not an aim true. If he takes up his particular examen and his rule of life, and his periodical penances, as merely medicinal appliances, if he shuts himself up in a reformatory school of his own, if he models his whole spiritual life upon the complacent theory of self-improvement, his asceticism will be nothing better than a systematizing and a glorifying of self-will. Under such auspices he can never be a spiritual man, and he will hardly be a moral man. Yet how common is this miserable view, even among men living right in the heart of a system so intensely supernatural as that of the Catholic Church!

The will-of-God view, on the contrary, refers everything, but diligence and correspondence, to Him. A man follows God's lead, and does not strike out a road for himself. He models himself in his measure and degree on the imitation of Jesus. He seeks to please God, and acts out of love. His inconsistencies neither

astonish nor tease him. An imperfection annoys him, not because it mars the symmetry of his character, but because it grieves the Holy Ghost. Sacraments, and scapulars, and beads and medals, relics and rites, all find their places in his system; and the natural and the supernatural form one whole. God is always pleased when a man seeks humbly and in appointed ways to please Him. Hence this man is quieted, cheerful and hopeful with his faults. The gaiety of endless success is in his heart. God is his Father. Whereas the self-improvement man either does not succeed in improving himself, or he does so too slowly, or he loses on one side what he gains on the other, or people will persist in being scandalized at his edifying deportment, for with such men edification is the crown of virtue, and if they do not edify, they have failed. Hence he is unquiet, sulky, and desponding about his faults. The bitterness of endless piecemeal failure is in his heart.

After death we shall have many revelations. I suspect the hiddenness of our spiritual growth here on earth will give rise to some. How surprised many humble spirits will be at the extraordinary beauty of their souls, when death has disengaged them! So much more is always going on than we in the least suspect!

—*Growth in Holiness*

A Want of Spiritual Discernment

There have been many wonderful pictures on this earth. The sorrows and the joys of men have brought about many pathetic occurrences, while their virtues and their vices have led to many catastrophies of the most thrilling and dramatic interest. Indeed, the constantly-intersecting fortunes of men are daily acting tragedies in real life, which, like the too faithful sunset of the painter, would seem in fiction to be unreal and exaggerated. There have been many mysteries, too, on earth, in which man was comparatively passive, and God acted by Himself; times when the Creator Himself has been pleased to fill the whole theater of His own creation; times also, as in the cool evenings

of Eden or at the door of Abraham's tent, when He has mingled with marvelous condescension among His creatures. But earth has seldom witnessed such a scene as Mary and Joseph and the Eternal Word, in the streets of Bethlehem at nightfall. The cold early evening of winter was closing in. Mary and Joseph had striven in vain to get a lodging. Saint Joseph was such a saint as the world had never seen before. Mary was above all saints, the first in the hierarchy of creatures, the queen of heaven whose power was the worthiest similitude of omnipotence, and who was eternally predestinated Mother of God. Within her bosom was the incarnate God Himself, the Eternal Word, the Maker and Sovereign of all in Bethlehem, the actual Judge of every passing soul that hour. But there was no room for them. The village was occupied with other things, more important according to the world's estimate of what is important. The imperial officers of the census were the great men there. Rich visitors would naturally claim the best which the inns could give. Most private houses would have relations from the country. Everyone was busy. This obscure group from Nazareth—that carpenter from Galilee, that youthful mother, that hidden Word—there was no room for them. They did not even press for it with enough complimentary importunity. It is not often that modesty is persuasive. A submissive demeanor is not an eloquent thing to the generality of men. If God does not make a noise in His own world, He is ignored. If He does, He is considered unseasonable and oppressive. Here in Bethlehem is the true Caesar come, the monarch of all the Roman Caesars, and there is no room for Him, no recognition of Him. It is His own fault, the world will say. He comes in an undignified manner. He makes no authentic assertion of His claims. He begins by putting Himself in a false position; for He comes to be enrolled as a subject instead of demanding homage as a sovereign. This is His way, and He expects us to understand it, and to know where to look for Him and when to expect Him. There was even a shadow of Calvary in the twilight which gathered round Bethlehem that night. Just as no one in Jerusalem

would take Him in during Holy Week, or give Him food, so that He had each night to retire to Bethany, in like manner no one in Bethlehem will take Him in, or give Him a shelter beneath which He may be born.

To all but its Creator the world makes no difficulty of at least a two-fold hospitality—to be born and to die, to come into the world and to go out of it. Yet, how did it treat Him in both these respects? He was driven among the animals and beasts of burden to be born. That little village of the least of tribes said truly it had no room for the Immense and Incomprehensible. Bethlehem could not indeed hold her who held within herself the Creator of the world. There was an unconscious truth, even in its inhospitality. He was to be born outside the walls of Bethlehem, as He died outside the walls of Jerusalem. Thus He had truly no native town. The sinless cattle gave Him ungrudging welcome; and an old cavity in the earth, fire-rent and water-worn, furnished Him with a roof somewhat less cold than the starry sky of a winter's night. So far as men were concerned, it was as much as He could do to get born and obtain a visible foothold on the earth. . . . And all the while He was God! These are old thoughts, but they are always new. They grow deeper as we dwell upon them. We sink further down into them as we grow older. Every time we think them, they so take us by surprise that it is as if we were now thinking them for the first time. No words do justice to them. The tears of the saints are more significant than words; but they cannot express the astonishing mystery of this inhospitable Bethlehem, which will not give its God room to be born within its walls.

Alas! the spirit of Bethlehem is but the spirit of a world which has forgotten God. How often has it been our spirit also! How are we, through churlish ignorance, forever shutting out from our doors heavenly blessings! Thus it is that we mismanage all our vows, not recognizing their heavenly character, although it is blazoned after their own peculiar fashion upon their brows. God comes to us repeatedly in life; but we do not know His full face. We only know Him when His back is turned, and He is departing

after our repulse. Why is it that, with a theory almost always right, our practice should be so often wrong? It is not so much from a want of courage to do what we know to be our duty, although nature may rebel against it. It is rather from a want of spiritual discernment. We do not sufficiently, or of set purpose, accustom our minds to supernatural principles. The world's figures are easiest to count by, the world's measures most handy to measure by. It is a tiresome work to be always looking at things from a different point of view from those around us; and, when this effort is to be life-long, it becomes a strain which cannot be continuous; and it only ceases to be a strain by our becoming thoroughly supernaturalized. Thus it is that a Christian life which has not made a perfect revolution in a man's worldly life, becomes no Christian life at all, but only an incommodious unreality, which gets into our way in this life, without helping us into the life to come. Hence it is that we do not know God when we see Him. Hence it is that we so often find ourselves on the wrong side without knowing how we got there. Hence it is that our instincts so seldom grasp what they are feeling after, our prophecies so often come untrue, our aims so constantly miss their ends. God is always taking us by surprise when we have no business to be surprised at all. Bethlehem did not in the least mean what it was doing. No one means half the evil which he does. Hence it is a grand part of God's compassion to look more at what we mean than what we do. Yet it is a sad loss for ourselves to be so blind. Is it not, after all, the real misery of life, the compendium of all miseries, that we are meeting God every day, and do not know Him when we see Him?

—*Bethlehem*

The Right View of Our Faults

The sweetest of all sweet doctrines, which St. Francis of Sales was inspired to teach us, was that which regarded the right view of our own faults. The consideration of it falls very naturally into

this place. On the one hand, we have got clear views of temptations and of scruples, and on the other, a perception of the necessity of an abiding sorrow for sin. That sorrow, as we now understand it, can be no source of scruples, but a right view of our own faults must fall in with and be a part of it. Unfortunately our faults form a great portion of ourselves, and it is plain that the management of them can be no slight affair in the spiritual life, and that our management of them depends very much upon the view we take of them.

Indeed, much of life depends upon taking right views of things. Time is saved. Mistakes are hindered. Sometimes we chance upon a short road to heaven. Not that the short roads are always the easiest. Strictly speaking, none are short and none are easy; but they may be comparatively so among themselves, and all are full of pleasantness and peace. What do we most abound in? Certainly, in faults. Perhaps a right view of them may be a short road to heaven. It will at all events help us to make a road of what looks like a series of barriers.

If a good person were asked to give an account of himself, it would probably be somewhat after the following fashion:

I am constantly doing things which are wrong in themselves. It is not that I do them on purpose, or with forethought. I hope I do not commit any venial sin deliberately. It is the great object of my life, next to loving God, to avoid that. Yet neither on the other hand can I say that my falls are altogether surprises. They seem so at the time, but not when I come to look back upon them. The sense of guilt grows upon me in the retrospect, rather than reproaches me at the moment. And, worst of all, I see no visible improvement in myself in this matter. Again, when I do things which are outwardly right, nay, which are generous, and involve some amount of sacrifice, I continually detect some low motive in them. I cannot shake off human respect. Self-love seems inseparable even from my very thoughts, my very sacrifices. It is not as if this happened now and then, but it is going on all day. It runs parallel with the stream of life. I believe I have never

done a good work in my life. A spoiled good work is my highest point.

But in prayer I am quite a different person. I seem to have entered another world. I am at my ease and at large. The aspirations of the saints appear to be mine. Desires of suffering, an appetite for calumny, tremendous penances, ardent resolutions, heroic deeds, all rush upon me at once, and express precisely what I am feeling most strongly in my interior life. Bold words, from which at other times I should have shrunk with reverence, fill my prayers. I plead the right of saints, and urge their petitions, and demean myself as if I were one. And all this before God! I do not mean to be insincere. I feel, or I fancy I feel, what I am saying. Yet when I come back to the level of my daily practice, I feel as if my prayer had been all an hypocrisy from beginning to end. I wish I could think that it were not so. There is no sort of proportion between my prayer and my practice. The first is always running ahead of the last, and so absurdly far ahead!

For when I come to practice, generosity in suffering is just what I cannot realize; and as to mortifications, they are simply to me what punishments are to a child. It would be as surprising to others as it is humiliating to myself, if I were to mention what little things I do for God, and what a laborious effort it takes to do them, and what immense pain it is. How I complain, and tremble, and put it off, and hunt for a justifiable dispensation, and sink back into comfortable spirituality, as soon as the momentary effort is over! The revelations I could make of my own pusillanimity would be almost incredible. But I was grand at prayer in the morning, grand as a martyr at the block in front of one of my own castles in the air.

The upshot of the whole is that I seem to myself to be getting worse and going back. My sensible fervors are gone, and I do not see that they have left formed habits behind them. I wish I could name any one imperfection that I could say had been effectually weeded out, or any one venial sin, whose

crowded ranks had been thinned, or that I could show anything beyond a scratch here and there on my ruling passion. All that I can see is that I make as much effort as I used to do, perhaps more, but apparently with less effect.

Now is a person who gives such an account of himself in a good way? Let me think. On the whole, Yes! I found my judgment on two things; the evident desire for perfection with which he began, and the fact of continued effort with which he ended. Starting then with these two things, he may reasonably take a consoling view of the rest. But let us speak of ourselves. Our faults are very numerous and great: true. But is there anything to surprise us in them? From our own knowledge of ourselves and from what we know of the measure of our grace, are they not what might have been expected? At times we have thought of our future humbly and prudently; was it very different from what has actually taken place? The fact is that neither in the kind nor in the degree of our faults, is there anything astonishing: and if nothing astonishing, then nothing discouraging. But this is not going far enough. There is something astonishing, and the astonishing thing is that our faults have not been greater. When we weigh ourselves against our temptations, our estimate of things is very different. How unlike ourselves we have happily been in many things! This can be nothing less than the work of grace. Instead of being peevish because we have been so bad, the wonder is that we have been so good, and the fear is lest we should be elated in seeing it.

Common sense also has a word or two to say on the matter. The faults are committed. They have done their harm, and gone to God. There is no good in being cast down. There is much good in not being so. There is no good in being cast down, for the faults cannot be recalled. We may fidget about the circumstances, and worry ourselves by thinking how easily the evil might have been avoided. But the fault itself lost us some of our peace; why should we now lose more in self-vexation? Discouragement moreover is no part of penance. It atones for nothing. It does not

make us more careful next time. On the contrary by dejecting us it makes us at once more open to temptation and less masculine in resisting it. But on the contrary there is much good in not being cast down. We shall be less teased with the imperfection in ourselves, and more occupied with the infidelity to God. To fall and not be out of spirits with it is not only to keep the courage we had, but to gain more. It is the humblest course, and on that account the most acceptable to God. It is the most reasonable, and therefore has the greater blessing.

Sometimes a saint gives us a new thought, which for what we can see is not to be found in any of the spiritual writers before him. It is his contribution to the tradition. When he has said it, it sounds so commonplace that we wonder we never thought of it for ourselves, like the sayings of all great minds. Such a thought is that of St. Francis of Sales, the man of many new thoughts, when he taught us that if in the spiritual life we often fall without perceiving it, so it must be true that we as often get up again without perceiving it. It sounds like a pleasantry: but if a man who has the infelicitous habit of disquieting himself about his faults, would once in a while take it for the subject of his hour's meditation, he would suck from it the very marrow of spiritual wisdom. I should spoil it if I enlarged upon it.

We may imagine that we take a sufficiently low view of ourselves, and estimate our attainments, as humility would approve. But any disquietude about our faults which is more than transient, or a temptation, is a proof to us that we have secretly been putting a far higher price upon ourselves than we were warranted in doing. And this turning king's evidence against us is the only good such disquietude ever does, and that is, as it were, in spite of itself. But does not God occasionally show us fearful things in the depths of our own souls? Sometimes a family with the sunshine of domestic peace and virtue all around it has tenanted an ancient house for years, when lo! the necessity of some repairs leads to the discovery of secret dungeons and horrible places underground, with traces of misery suffered there, and of guilt

perpetrated. So it is in our own souls. The access of some unusual temptation, the accidental waking up of some long-dormant passion, or a flash of supernatural light from God, illuminate for a moment unexplored cavities and unexpected materials for evil. It may be that the reading or hearing of great crimes may have brought it home to us. But by whatever means we make the discovery, there can be no doubt that we carry about with us immense capabilities of uncommitted sin. Nothing but the merciful turns of a considerate Providence, and the constraining empire of grace, prevent these from being realized in acts. O how we crouch under God's mantle, and hold to His feet, when we first get sight of these things! What an amazing, what a blessed disproportion between the evil we do and the evil we are capable of doing, and seem sometimes on the very verge of doing! If my soul has grown tares, when it was full of seeds of nightshade, how happy ought I to be! And that the tares have not wholly strangled the wheat, what a wonder it is, an operation of grace, the work of the sacraments! If the heathen emperor thanked God daily for the temptations which He did not allow to approach him, how ought not we to thank Him for the sins we have not committed!

—*Growth in Holiness*

What is It to Pray Always?

The spiritual life is quite cognizably a distinct thing from the worldly life; and the difference comes from prayer. When grace lovingly drives a man to give himself up to prayer, he gets into the power of prayer, and prayer makes a new man of him; and so completely does he find that his life is prayer, that at last he prays always. His life itself becomes one unbroken prayer. Unbroken, because it does not altogether nor so much reside in methods of mental or forms of vocal prayer; but it is an attitude of heart by which all his actions and sufferings become living prayers.

The life of prayer, therefore, which is the badge of the supernatural man, is the praying always. But what is it to pray always? What did our Lord mean by it? To pray always is always to feel the urgency of prayer, and to hunger after it. Grace is palpably felt and touched in prayer; hence it strengthens our faith and inflames our love. The peculiar trial of hard work is that it keeps us so much from prayer, and takes away the flower of our strength before we have time for prayer, and physical strength is very needful for praying well. In consequence of this attraction we acquire habits of prayer by having set times for it, whether mental or vocal. Not that a mere habit of praying will make anyone a man of prayer. But God will not send His fire, if we do not first lay the sacrifice in order. We must also practice ejaculatory prayer, and have certain fixed ejaculations, as well as make frequent spontaneous aspirations to heaven during the day, at will, and out of the fervid abundance of our hearts. Besides this, there is certain gravitation of the mind to God in a prayerful way, which comes from love and from the practice of the divine presence, and which ranges from intercession to thanksgiving, and from thanksgiving to praise, and from praise to petition, according as the moods of our mind change, and with hardly any trouble or any conscious process. To pray always is, furthermore, to renew frequently our acts of pure intention for the glory of God, and thus to animate with the life of prayer our actions, conversations, studies, and sufferings.

This is to pray always: and see what comes of it! Into what a supernatural state it throws a man! He lives in a different world from other men. Different dwellers are round about him, and are his familiars, God, Jesus, Mary, Angels, and Saints. They are the undercurrent of his mind, and often preside over the very expression of his thoughts. He has not the same interests, hopes, and aims as other men. When he wishes to do anything, he goes to work in a different way from others, and he tests his success differently. Indeed, in nothing is he so remote from men of the world as in his tests of success, which are wholly supernatural

and full of the unearthly spirit of the Incarnation. His views of the world are strange, although they are definite and clear, because somehow he sees the world confusedly through the vision of the Church; and he judges of the relations and distances of things according as they group around the central faith. His affections become shifted, so that he is regarded even by those near him as an impossible man, and by those further off as a cold heart that is destitute of natural affections and the keen sympathies of kindred. Moreover the temper of repose which prayer breeds is unfavorable to success and advancement in a worldly sense, because it is unfavorable to the eager desire and restless pursuit of them.

This influence of prayer comes out in a man's opinions and judgments of men, measures, and things. It is heard in his language. It is seen in his tranquility. It is recognized in his dealings with others, and is the ruling principle of his occasional apparent want of sympathy with others. Such is a man whose faculties, affections, and in some degree even his senses, have been mastered by the spirit of prayer. We should expect it would win men by its gracefulness, like an angel's presence. But it is not so, because its beauty requires a spiritual discernment. To the eyes of the world such a man has all the strangeness and awkwardness of a foreigner, which in sober truth he is. Yet such a man is striking to others in after-thought, as the Blessed Sacrament so often is to Protestants, when they have come unawares into His presence and gone again. It is the way of God, and of the things of God, to be striking in afterthought.

The most serious business of the interior life is mental prayer, of which I will speak first. Spiritual writers, and even saints, have sometimes spoken as if meditation were almost necessary to salvation; and there are senses and cases in which this may be true. It is, however, quite certain that mental prayer is necessary to perfection, and that there can be nothing like a spiritual life without it. For mental prayer means the occupation of our faculties upon God, not in the way of thinking or speculating about

Him, but stirring up the will to conform itself to Him and the affections to love Him. The subjects on which it is engaged are all the works of God, as well as His own perfections; and above all, the Sacred Humanity of our Blessed Lord. The length of time to be spent in it will vary with individual cases; and there are a variety of methods out of which a man may choose. But it is most important he should keep to his method when he has chosen it.

Mental prayer, in itself difficult, is rendered still more so by the temptations which beset it. It is irksome, quite beyond all explanation as well as expectation; and its irksomeness tempts us to abandon it. Very often when we try to meditate, a sheer inability to think at all comes over us in a most unaccountable manner. Whatever may be the bodily posture, which we are recommended to assume at prayer, its sameness becomes wearisome; and if we keep changing, anything worthy of the name of prayer is out of the question. Distractions torment us at every turn, and their name is legion. Sensible devotion is our only hope, and it is continually being withdrawn, without apparent fault of ours. Temptations to intermit our meditation seems specious, when temptations to abandon it altogether would be rejected. At other times we are tempted to think its importance has been exaggerated. And if we dare disturb nothing else about it, we satisfy our restlessness by varying our times for it, and even for this slight concession we often pay dearly.

Now the remedy for all these temptations consists in our considering our meditation as the great feature of our day, in our spending all the time we can in spiritual reading, in being full, open, and obedient to our director in all questions concerning it, in weaning ourselves by degrees from sensible consolations, and in estimating at their proper value the fruits of a dry, or as we often perversely call it, a bad meditation. We must throw our whole strength into this matter; for the practice of the presence of God, our strength against evil angels and evil habits, our habitual cheerfulness, our ability to carry crosses, and

all that we can do ourselves towards final perseverance, depend on prayer.

—Growth in Holiness

Under Every Sorrow There is Joy

There are some who have said that joy is a more shallow thing than sorrow. Surely this is not a just view to take of God's creation, even since the fall. Truly, joy is undermost and sorrow is uppermost; but from this very cause joy is the deeper of the two. The heart of the spiritual world, where its central fires are, is deepest joy. The world of sorrow rests upon it, as on a secure foundation. As under every stone there is moisture, so under every sorrow there is joy; and when we come to understand life rightly, we see that sorrow is, after all, but the minister of joy. We dig into the bosom of sorrow to find the gold and precious stones of joy. Sorrow is a condition of time, but joy is the condition of eternity. All sorrow lies in exile from God; all joy lies in union with Him. In heaven joy will cast out sorrow—whereas there is not a lot on earth from which sorrow has been able altogether to banish joy. Joy clings to us as the creatures of God. It adheres to us wherever we go. Its fragrance is palpable about us. Its sunshine lights upon us and gives us some sort of attractiveness above that which is our own. Joy hangs about everything which God has had to do with. There is only one place where there is no joy and that dark region is under a special law of its own, and is darkness because it would not be light. There is an inevitable joyousness about all that belongs to God. We are angry with ourselves because we do not sorrow long enough for our dead. We think it almost a wrong to the memory of those we loved. But it is the elasticity of life. Our hearts bound upward because God is above. We cannot help ourselves. The very purling of our blood in our veins is joyous, because life is a gift direct from God. In truth, joy and sorrow are not contradictories. Sorrow is the setting of joy, the foil of joy, the shadow which

softens joy, the gloom which makes the light so beautiful, the night which causes each morning to have the gladness of a resurrection. They live together because they are sisters. Joy is the eldest-born and when the younger dies—as she will die—joy will keep a memory of her about her forever more, a memory which will be very gracious, so gracious as to be part of the bliss of heaven.

There are souls too in the world which have the gift of finding joy everywhere, and of leaving it behind them when they go. Joy gushes from under their fingers like jets of light. There is something in their very presence, in their mere silent company from which joy cannot be extricated and laid aside. Their influence is an evitable gladdening of the heart. It seems as if a shadow of God's own gift had passed upon them. They give light without meaning to shine; and coy hearts, like the bashful insects, come forth and almost lay aside their sad natures and weave dances in the golden beams of these bright natures. Somehow, too, the joy all turns to God. Without speaking of Him, it preaches Him. Its odor is as the odor of His presence. It leaves tranquility behind, and frequently sweet tears of prayer. All things grow silently Christian under its reign. It brightens, ripens, softens, and transfigures like the sunlight, the most improbable things which come within its sphere. A single gifted heart like this is the apostle of its neighborhood. Everyone acknowledges its divine right which it never thinks of claiming. There is no need to claim it for none resist its unconquerable gentleness. Joy is like a missioner who speaks of God; sorrow is a preacher who frightens men out of the deadliness of sin into the arms of their heavenly Father, or who weans them by the pathos of his reasoning from the dangerous pleasures of the world. These bright hearts are more like the first than the second. They have a great work to do for God and often they do it most when they realize it least. It is the breath they breathe, and the star they were born under, and the law which encircles them. They have a light within them which was not delusive when they were young and

which age will only make more golden without diminishing its heat. To live with them is to dwell in a perpetual sunset of unboisterous mirth and placid gaiety. Who has not known such souls? Who has not owed all that is best in him, after grace, to such as those? Happy is he who had such for the atmosphere of his parental home! Its glory may have sunk beneath the horizon, but he himself will be illuminated by its glow until the hour comes for his own pensive setting. Of a truth, he is the happiest, the greatest, and the most godlike of men as well as the sole poet among men who has added one true joy to the world's stock of happiness.

—*Bethlehem*

5.

Struggles and Victories

Facts and Principles

Holiness depends less upon what we do than upon how we do it. In spiritual things the goodness of the matter is of more consequence than its novelty. In devotion it is better to be safe than to be original.

Reading the life of a saint is a very edifying thing. But when we have read many hundreds of saints' lives we begin to see a great deal which we never saw before. We learn a wisdom from them that no single life of a saint can give. The peculiarities of saints drop out of sight. We see them as a whole, as a class, as a species. We perceive what is common to them all, and what is the foundation of sanctity in them all. This is of far more importance to us than their individual examples. . . . What I assert is that the saints, as a class, did few things. Their lives were by no means crammed with works, even with works of mercy. They made a point of keeping considerable reserves of time for themselves and for the affairs of their own souls. Their activity was

far more contemplative than we are inclined to suspect. They were men whose devotional practices were few in number and remarkably simple in method. . . . The lives of the saints often innocently deceive us in this respect—especially those lives which are modeled on the Process of Canonization. A chapter on a saint's heroic charity will perhaps overwhelm us by its crowded facts, multiplied occupations, incessant movement, superhuman activities and the like. We forget it represents fifty or sixty years of twelve months each. But if we turn to the chapter on the saint's gift of prayer, we find that he spent four or five hours a day in prayer. . . . Check the chapter on charity by the chapter on prayer and you will get some notable results about the saints. Many saints have been made saints by one thing. The sanctity of many has been consummated in its very beginning. To these, conversion has been the same thing as perseverance. Saint Antony of the Desert and Saint Francis of Assisi are examples of this class of saints. Hence it was that the great feature of their holiness was its extreme simplicity. Saint Francis' manner of prayer by repetition may be quoted as an instance of this characteristic simplicity. Think again of what Saint Alphonsus and others say of a single Communion, that it is enough to make a saint, or what Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice says of gaining Indulgences, that one practice is a certain road to sanctity. We do not extract from our graces one-half the sweetness, one-half the nourishment, one-half the medicinal virtue which God has deposited in them. We are too quick with them, too impetuous in the use of them; we do not develop them. I believe that the clear knowledge of what grace is, its nature, its habits, and its possibilities would destroy half the lukewarmness in the world for I suspect that full half of it comes from impetuosity and precipitation, from human activity, and a want of slowness before God. . . . What it comes to is that the only important thing in good works is the amount of love we put into them.

The soul of an action is its motive. The power of an action is neither in its size nor in its duration, though both of these are

very considerable matters. But its power is in its intention. An intention is pure in proportion as it is loving. Thus you see that what we want is not many actions, but a great momentum in a few actions. If we could give an equally great momentum to a great number of actions, so much the better. But the fact is that we cannot. Actions trip each other up when they become crowded. No one has the use of his arms in a crowd, and very little use of his legs. His voice is all that is free, and that is not very audible and in heavenly things the voice is a most singularly unhelpful part of us. In good deeds we cannot unite number and momentum. We must choose between the two and there can be no hesitation in the choice. One stone that we can throw into heaven is worth a thousand that fall short of it and tumble into homeless space. . . . There is no doubt, then, that the principle of number must go to the wall. We make our election of momentum. Momentum is purity of intention. Purity of intention is love.

It is true that, as a general rule, great love gives a facility in doing hard things. But I am not speaking of heroic love. I am speaking of such a love as you and I may persist in exacting from ourselves, considering all the grace we receive. Love which is sufficient to give momentum enough to carry an action to heaven may not be sufficient to make a hard thing easy to do, neither need it be accompanied by any sensible sweetness. Indeed, in most cases it is not. Nay, I will go further. It is not by any means clear that heroic love devours all the repugnances of nature with sufficient rapidity to give even saints an habitual facility of action in hard things, any more than it makes the flames of the martyrs cool and refreshing and the teeth of wild beasts as gentle as embraces, although it has done so to some. But it is perfectly clear that even heroic love is by no means universally accompanied by sensible sweetness in its exercise. It is often very heroic when it is driest, and most heroic when it is not so much as conscious of its own existence. Hence we must not distrust our actions or devotions because they have not this sensible sweetness, neither must we make such sweetness the test of our purity

of intention. It is no part of real momentum. We must be the more careful to bear this in mind because in mere natural activity facility and sweetness are half the momentum. If this were to be the case, in religion, piety must begin in sentimentality, grow in excitement, and perfect itself in frenzy. Christian enthusiasm is a very sober sort of determination. It does not consist in neglecting calculations, but in running immense risks in the face of very disheartening calculations. . . .

Now, this doctrine of intention gives a peculiar character to all our actions. We see that their value does not depend upon their size or age altogether, or even chiefly. They have to do with God, to whom, because He is infinite, nothing is great and nothing small. Greatness and littleness are not His standards. Thus, the capabilities of our humblest actions have something in them that approaches the inexhaustible. Or, at least, they are of such a nature that grace can use them almost inexhaustibly. We have given graces neither time nor room. Their capabilities are immense. This is one of the things that makes holiness so difficult. Take the saying of the Angelus three times a day. What is it but saying a short prayer when the bell rings? Yet, years of saying it with great love, with intense attention to God, with an interior spirit of jubilant thanksgiving for the Incarnation, would take us half-way to heaven. Nay, one such saying of it, if we came to that, could merit heaven. This illustrates the inexhaustibleness of grace. Then, is it not true that the saying of the Angelus is really a very considerable difficulty? When the bell startles us, how far we find ourselves to have been from God by the very fact that we hardly get back to Him before the prayer is over! We sometimes hardly know what we are saying. If someone interrupts us by coming into the room, we do not know where we left off. No devotion can be less satisfactory to us. Yet, when it is over, how the study or the conversation pieces itself naturally and painlessly on to its antecedents, as if there had been no Angelus, while there was something positively painful in the

effort we made to put ourselves together for the act of prayer. . . . The difficulty I find in saying the Angelus always shows me more than anything else the immeasurable distance between holy persons and myself. It illustrates to me the way a man must possess himself and be recollected, and always ready to give due momentum to his actions, and therefore how few they should be in order that he may have time and room, not so much to do what he has to do, as to do it well.

It is only in exceptional cases that coolness and calmness are compatible with having much to do. Multitude is not simplicity. Things that are done for God should be done very cleanly. They must be shapely as well as vigorous. What a beautiful thing, doubtless, was the Angelus of Saint Francis de Sales! There was more in it than in a week of our devotional failures. When a man has to make a great effort, he must carefully put himself in a position to make it. The saints threw immense effort into their least actions. Immense efforts cannot help being limited in number. Hence the saints were men of few actions and few devotions. Their power was love, their touchstone pure intention. They concentrated everything upon their intention. They made it do duty for everything else. It was their compendium of holiness. When we who are not saints want to be better than we are, we add a new devotion, put on an additional mortification, undertake a fresh work of mercy, or give liberal alms. This is all excellent. But, as an animal betrays itself by its instincts, however long it may have been domesticated, so we, who may be always reading the lives of the saints, betray by all this that inadequate view of holiness which belongs to the imperfection of our love. Our first impulsive notion of greater sanctity is some form of addition. The only variety is in the choice of what we shall add. The saints live in a roomy day, a day of few actions; they lessen these few as their fervor increases, perhaps make them still fewer by way of advancing more rapidly, and then throw harder more energetic inward life into what they do. This appears to me the whole

account of the saints. To begin, therefore, we must repudiate the additional theory. The saints were men who did less than other people, but who did what they had to do a thousand times better.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Weariness in Well-Doing

In the world of the soul there are sometimes shadows when there are no clouds. It continues clear and blue overhead, but the brightness has passed away. We cannot tell how the shadow began, or from what quarter it came. It will go as it came, without apparent cause, perhaps without observation. These inward shadows have mostly their significance. Sometimes they herald the coming of an unusual grace. Sometimes they warn us of the coming of an unusual trial. Yet this last is only another form of grace, because it is the occasion of many graces. Sometimes they come and go and we see no results. Nevertheless, the soul has suffered and there are results. But, whether these shadows prophesy graces or portend trials, they are in themselves times of temptation, and require both skill and care in their management. These temptations are very apt to take the form of weariness, that weariness in well-doing against which the apostle warned the Thessalonians, and which, in their case, as it is in ours, was likely to follow upon excitement—although our excitement need not, like theirs, arise from an immoderate interest in unfulfilled prophecy and the thickening signs of the end of the world.

It is of this weariness in the spiritual life that we are now to treat: and let us, first of all, endeavor to put it before ourselves, as we have doubtless experienced it in our own souls. We may describe it as follows. We are not aware of having shifted our position. We do not recall any graver sin than usual, into which we have fallen. There is no notable change in our external circumstances. Nevertheless, an imperceptible languor has been creeping upon us. We see it in the retrospect, but we did not see it in time. Prayer has become an effort. Its sweetness has gone

from it. A general disinclination to good works is added to this general disrelish of spiritual exercises. Our little mortifications lie like a dead weight upon us. The most sacred actions seem likely to degenerate into routine. We feel the immense importance of an effort, but have no heart to make one. There have been times when we have thrown off far greater burdens but this one is too much for us. We still have religious sentiments, but this is pretty nearly all the religion we have which is sensible. The light appears to go out from the things of faith. They are blotted and confused. Our own conscience eludes us. We have no grasp of it. The power appears to have retreated from the sacraments. We have fallen, we know not how, into a state which bears no little affinity to unbelief. It seems to us that we really can go on no longer. Perseverance is hopeless. Nothing has come of the past, less is likely to come of the future. The present is vacuity. We thought we loved God. Poor souls! are we sure we do not love Him still? Alas! we might manage to die now; but dying is not the difficulty; the difficulty is to go on living. What! another twenty years of morning meditation; of morning, noon and night particular examen, of daily recitations of the divine office, of daily resistance to temptations, of daily defeats by the same petty unworthiness! Does it not seem impossible? But what if matters should grow worse? Here we are succumbing not to our passions, not to temptations, not to ponderous crosses, but simply to a feeling of being tired! A while ago, all things were clear. Now we are like men trying to read small print by strong moonlight. There is light enough, but not the right kind of light. We cannot be very far from despair. We are like men in a nightmare, frantic because we cannot throw off a load which has no real existence; or like men sinking into a lethargy, whose fingers open and let fall that which they are in the act of grasping.

I think I have put matters at the worst now. I hardly think I have overstated the evil. However, I have not understated it. Of course it is serious but it has no right to be disheartening. It may seem superfluous to talk of courage to a man who is already

cowed. I ought to reason with you first. But is it not generally the case that the most consoling thing in spiritual difficulties is to go well into them and study them thoroughly? Even without any professed consolation, they always seem much less formidable afterward. It is just the same in controversy. If you will not let people prose their own length about their difficulties, conviction rarely follows. But in nine cases out of ten, a man who has talked his fill about his objection finds that he has already answered it himself, and with some show of fight for consistency's sake easily surrenders and surrenders reasonably. Nevertheless, let us take this comfort in starting. Is not our state in its results the same with an interior trial through which Job was made to pass? "Who will grant me," says he, in his anguish, "that I might be according to the months past, according to the days in which God kept me? When his lamp shined over my head, and I walked by his light in darkness? As I was in the days of my youth, when God was secretly in my tabernacle? And now my soul fadeth within myself, and the days of affliction possess me." The trial of a faded soul! It is hard to bear. But Job bore it, and came safely to his end and lies now in the bosom of his heavenly Father. It will be so with us. Doubt not.

Let us think, then, of the probable or possible causes of this weariness. Most things are adequately explained by their causes. I am inclined to think this weariness comes more often from not advancing than from any actual faults. It is said that not to advance is to be going back in the spiritual life. I would venture to doubt the entire accuracy of this statement. When a man is endeavoring to get out of sin, it may be that every step which is not forward is a step backward. Also, it may be true in the spiritual life that all present delay makes future progress more difficult, and so, less probable. But surely there are many persons whose life is spent at a standstill. It is not that they are standing still themselves, but that their efforts just enable them to maintain their ground and no more. It is like rowing a boat against a stream. There is sufficient effort to counterbalance the force of

the stream, but not sufficient to surmount it. The result is that the boat remains opposite the same place, not in spite of the rowing, but in consequence of the rowing. If the rower ceased he would be carried down the stream; if he exerted himself more he would make way up it. It may be said that the continuance of the effort is a great thing, and is substantially progress. It is a great thing, certainly; it is forming habits. It is augmenting merits. It is keeping in a safe position. But it can hardly be called progress, at least in the ordinary sense of the word progress. Lancicius says that not to increase our *kinds* of venial sin is progress. It is progress in the sense of keeping on the road to heaven, but assuredly it is not progress in the ordinary acceptation of the word. It is not even full correspondence to grace; for the impulses of grace are always onward, always forgetting what has been attained, always leaving that which is behind, as the apostle tells us. Now, monotony is disheartening; and when we are out of heart, we are at once weary, however little we have labored. If we go on rowing, and we have not passed that tree on the bank all the while, we are discontented with ourselves; and to be discontented with ourselves is instantaneous weariness. The sense of abundant grace falling upon us, and no results following, or very inadequate results, is sure to fatigue us in the long run and bring on vexation and discouragement. Moreover, there are few of us who can do without success. The fountains of self-love are not self-supplying. Natural activity cannot fast; it is much if we can get it to abstain. Whatever amount of effort may go to maintain us in the same spot, it is not success. We get disgusted, and disgust implies weariness. Thus it is that the mere fact of not advancing does in most cases account for that feeling of being tired, which unnerves us and is a real hindrance to us in the pursuit of holiness.

We must not forget, however, that many of the phenomena of the spiritual life spring from physical causes. Our body can go wrong, short of illness, short of ailment. It is a very delicate and capricious instrument. The reaction after hard work, different

seasons of the year, individual constitution, very slight atmospherical disturbances, all of them tend to bring forth many moral results without the intervention of actual pain or positive malady. This is a very difficult subject to handle. It is full of dangers. We are all of us too much inclined to make concessions to our bodies. Reliance on comforts is quite incompatible with true liberty of spirit. The worship of health is one of the most efficient and extensive causes of lukewarmness and indevotion. At the same time, the fact is true that our soul is very much dependent on our body. If we begin attributing to supernatural causes, whether to the operations of grace, or the wiles of Satan, what is really a matter of nerves or of digestion, we are soon in the land of mischievous delusions. We soon become discouraged when we have not need to be so. We believe our inner self to be the theater of much that is not going on there at all, and our self-knowledge becomes clouded by exaggeration.

But the important thing to be considered is that our physical difficulties have to be sanctified just as much as our spiritual difficulties. Bodily disturbance is no dispensation from duty until it begins to be something like incapability, or at least the attempt to discharge the duty would be an imprudence. This is the common mistake. Granted that our evil temper comes just now from nerves or indigestion; but not granted that it is on that account to be any the less combated. The monstrous assumption that most of us make is that this corporal annoyance, which accounts for our irritability, or any other sin, excuses it. For this there is not a shadow of proof. To account for a thing and to excuse a thing are two vastly different processes. Charity may use such an assumption in our judgment of others, in order to justify the ingenuity of its benignant constructions. But we cannot use it as a plea for self-acquittal, and rarely even as an argument for diminution of self-punishment. If we once so much as *begin* to do this we have not merely taken a step off the right road, but we have fallen over a precipice. The same reason obviously applies to sorrow, vexation, misfortune, uncertainty, the sense of

injustice, wounded feelings, or the chafing of responsibilities. These harrassments are the sources of many things that go wrong in the spiritual life. But, while they account for them, they do not excuse them. For these bodily and mental necessities and infirmities are just what we have to defend ourselves against and bring into subjection to grace. At the same time, we shall be more simple, genuine, childlike, and straightforward, when we attribute the discomforting phenomena, without surprise, to these natural causes, than when we fancy all manner of supernatural possibilities which have no real existence in our case and the thought of which is in itself enough to do us harm, because it engenders in us a kind of confused and underground feeling that we are suffering, or being put through something in common with the saints. Now it is plain that weariness is just the kind of misery which bodily disturbance or mental anxiety would be likely to produce. For both body and mind chafe the soul; and chafing makes it fretful; and fretfulness is near akin to weariness.

At the same time, I am far from denying the almost incessant action of the Evil One upon our souls in the spiritual life, or from confining it to the higher and more unusual conditions of those aiming at perfection. It is not the saints only who fight with devils. We all do so. Or, if we do not, it is because we already belong to Satan and are his property. There is no doubt that our weariness is very often from this preternatural source; and it must be acknowledged that the thought is a very discouraging one. Yet it is foolish to expect that there should be no discouragement in the lifelong effort to win heaven. There are worse things in spirituality than discouragement, bad as it is. But perfect humility alone is exempt from it. We must be content, therefore, to feel that the Evil One has great power over us, even against our own will, but that he cannot force us to sin. He can only make us suffer. God is our Father and so He that is for us is greater than all those who are against us. There are, perhaps, no infallible signs by which we can tell when our languor comes from this preternatural source. But we may generally suppose that

such is its origin, when we feel it in spiritual things, and not in other things, when it comes on us instantaneously, when it affects the exercises of the interior life more than the discharge of external duties, and when it keeps palpably increasing without any visible cause to which we can refer it. Still, even when we suppose our weariness thus to come upon us, we are neither to struggle less determinedly, against it, nor to imagine that we are ourselves to be forthwith acquitted of all blame in the matter.

Not unfrequently this weariness is a punishment for past sin. When the Holy Ghost is grieved, the soul is weary. An intermittent piety is especially punished in this way. If we are easy in allowing outward interruptions to break in upon our usual devotions, if for slight ailments we suspend our ordinary prayers, if we permit anxieties and occupations to make us omit our frequentation of the sacraments, and, above all, if we are not punctual and systematic in our examinations of conscience, the feeling of weariness comes upon us as we return to them. In the ordinary course of things, perseverance implies freshness. Yesterday is an impulse to today, and today will be an impulse to tomorrow. Being pious by jerks is common enough but it is sure to be a failure. Excitements may awaken us out of sin but they cannot constitute real progress.

But of all the faults which are punished by this weariness, the most common and the one which has most affinity to its punishment is the want of recollection. Dissipated thoughts, exuberant, unweighed words, an impatience under solitude, distracted prayers, objectless frittering away of time, passive half-unconscious dreaming—all this is want of recollection. It loosens our hold upon God. It blunts our sense of His presence. It unmans the soul and relaxes its powers, as if we had swallowed some deleterious drug. Even in our solitude we may be unrecollected; for silence does not of itself insure recollection. We may have dissipating pursuits. We may read too much or too variously. We may forget Thomas à Kempis's advice, that we had better be content to be ignorant of many things. We may spread our attention over too

wide a surface. We may load our minds with too great an abundance of images. We may even insensibly let the thought of God do duty for direct prayer to God. Certainly, when a man is alone he has to hold his tongue and the mere holding of our tongues is the cessation of two-thirds of the venial sins of our lives. Nevertheless, contemplative vocations are rare, and when a man has not such a vocation solitude which is anything more than occasional, dissipates him more than work will do. It is easy to unspiritualize our solitude. We know that we have done so when we become unbusiness-like in our devotions. An intolerable fit of weariness is at hand. We must be almost as quick as lightning, like sailors in a squall, if we would get ready to meet it safely, or rather, to bear it safely, for it comes upon us mostly from behind. If it is occasionally a prophecy of the future, it is more often a child of the past.

Self-will has a peculiar power to bring on this weariness. I do not mean self-will in religious things only, but a course of self-will, even in things indifferent. There is something especially corrupting in the following of our own wills, however trifling the things in which we follow them may be. This is why Saint Paul tells us to do everything for the glory of God. This is why kindness is such a help to piety because it gives us an external motive in almost all the social or domestic occurrences of the day. To have no master is to be a slave. The despotism of liberty is the most degrading of all despotisms. It villifies all that is noble and generous in our nature. It is incompatible with magnificence of action. The grandiloquence of self-praise is the highest eminence it can reach. Moreover, of all despots, self-will is the most base-born, and has also the fewest acquired capabilities of governing. If, then, you let self-will ride you, even in indifferent things, it will gallop you to death, and you will be good for nothing for weeks afterward.

Then, again, there is a weariness which is the mere weariness of perseverance. There is something in perseverance which is uncongenial to the caprice and instability of our nature. To judge

from what we see, perseverance even in the uniformity of sin is difficult, notwithstanding that our corrupt propensities incline us in the same direction. Still more, then, is this the case with perseverance in a line of conduct which is always more or less a constraint; because it is an incessant warfare. There is a monotony in well-doing, and it is not a monotony of success. The same resolutions, the same efforts, the same partial failure, the same round of humbling experience, which has become as familiar to us and as uninteresting as counting a hundred—these things when they go on for years, and are stripped of all excitement, which is as oil to the wheels of our natural activity, begin to bear very hard upon us. Instead of growing easier, as a habit in natural things does, piety grows harder. It seems as if the burden increased with the numerical sum of years. Sometimes circumstances combine to make it almost intolerable. We are like men hanging over a cliff. Our whole weight hangs upon our fingers, and they are grasping a rock which their own moisture renders every moment more slippery. We feel that if some unexpected succor does not come, our destruction is but an affair of minutes. The tide of grace is not uniform. We have for the most part no idea how large a proportion of our continuance in devotion is due to grace, and not to our own efforts. If the tide of grace ebbs unusually low for a time, it is quite a terror to us to see how little we have to do with our own goodness, how little, absolutely, and how much less than we heretofore conceived was possible. It is a wholesome terror. The feeling of utter dependence upon grace is half perseverance. Our confidence in God is always in proportion to our want of confidence in ourselves. Our helplessness is the hopeful feature of our grace. Nevertheless, these ebbs of grace, the appearances of our perseverance being worn through and threadbare, are trying moments. In mercy they generally last but a little while. But when they come in middle life, when the fever of our beginnings is past and spiritual habits are not yet mature, they are especially hard to bear and we seldom pass through them without a loss.

Then, last of all, there is no doubt a weariness which is altogether supernatural, wholly an operation of grace, or, at least, a divine permission. God sends it to us not so much as a punishment for sin, as one of the processes by which our soul is to be cleansed and fitted for higher things. It is also true that these divine visitations are not confined to contemplative souls, or only accompany the more delicate and less common operations of grace. They are perhaps more common than we suppose. Nevertheless, they are rare. All I need observe about them here is that there is no necessity we should know when our weariness is from God. Indeed, it is generally an essential part of the trial that we should not know it. It is not necessary to know it, because the knowledge would not alter our manner of dealing with it. It would only be a comfort. It would not be required in order to moderate our discouragement. For, if the trial came to us as an operation of grace, it would probably bring with it a degree of humility that would counterbalance the discouragement.

These are the sources from which this feeling of weariness may proceed. Let us next look at the mischief which it does. It makes us leave off good works or suspend spiritual exercises. It breeds in us a spurious kind of prudence. Because we feel a burden, we argue that we have taken too much upon ourselves. We must draw back while we can. We must abridge our hours of prayer. We must strike off some of our little mortifications, because, though very little, they are exceedingly tiresome. We reason like men who think they need not keep Lent because fasting weakens them and, more or less, tells upon their health, which of course it was meant to do within certain bounds. It is in our seasons of weariness that we come down from the mountain a little, and put ourselves on a slightly lower level, and applaud our timely discretion. Alas! many slight descents come to make a considerable descent in time, and we, who began with determining to be saints—where are we now?

When weariness does not cause us to leave things off, it leads us to do them badly and perfunctorily. We think our fatigue an

adequate dispensation from vigilance and recollection. Now, what if it should be true in the spiritual life that the not doing of a thing at all, provided that it is not of obligation, is a less evil than the doing of it badly? I should not wonder if it were so. Indeed, I am inclined to suspect it is. At any rate, the ill doing of a good thing is a very great evil. For, it not only renders unmeritorious those works by which we might greatly merit, but it makes them perfect nests of venial sins. Moreover, such fraudulent doing of God's work has a special curse attached to it in Scripture and is full of grave consequences to the soul.

Furthermore, weariness makes us impatient of God's company. Holiness is the companionship of God. It requires a renovation of the heart by grace, the infusion of heavenly instincts, a complete revolutionizing of our natural tastes, an unearthly appreciation of things, before we can taste this company of God and find it sweet. There must be a great change in us before He can be our resting-place. Now, it is our spiritual tastes which are the first things for weariness to vitiate. God becomes dull to us. He is uninteresting. How ever was it that we took such delight in prayer? That little dawn of love of suffering which began to lighten our hearts—was it not some foolish delusion? That delicious feeling of sinking lower and lower in the sense of our own unworthiness—was it not all a mistake, or perhaps a dream? We cannot feel as we ever felt before and we cannot believe that we ever felt so before. To be weary of God, to turn away with impatience from our eternal home, to have taken the bloom off this world and to be sick of the other! We tire of Him, never to be tired of Whom is in itself our everlasting bliss! Oh, if we die in the attempt, we must push on. We cannot be quiet for an hour under pressure of such unblessed fatigue as this.

But this leads further. It leads to that endless hopeless business of seeking consolations and recreations outside of God, and, shortly afterward, far away from God. I sometimes think that to be near God but outside of Him is to be at a greater distance than when we are far away from Him, as we speak in the spiritual

life. To wish to be comforted by any one but Him is always a sad misfortune and very often a positive sin. But to turn away from Him and to seek in creatures what we profess not to have found adequately in Him—this is surely of all miseries the nearest to a state of sin. As I said, it is an endless and hopeless business. There is no end to it because it is a search which we can never find, a chase which can never come up with its prey, a journey which has no termination. Like bees among distasteful flowers, we fly from one to another, hardly lighting, merely tasting; but the honey which we taste is drugged. It stimulates, or intoxicates, or makes us drowsy. Thus, our tastes become more and more vitiated. We are just as far as ever from finding what we sought, but we are immeasurably farther from what we have left. Strange to say, creature-consolation becomes more of a necessity to us the less we are satisfied by it. The more completely we despair of finding it, the more obstinately do we persist in seeking it. It is a kind of spiritual debauchery, which will at last leave the soul a perfect wreck, with all its powers of self-recovery gone, and with no possible hope except in a miracle of grace, the only likelihood of which is in that peculiar love of God which seems to be only the more patiently excited by the special unlovingness of our desertion of Him. When we see a soul in such a state as this, we involuntarily hold our breath as when we see a man upon the verge of some perilous height. What then should we think and feel if our own soul is consciously traveling that way? This vain search of creature-consolation, like all failures, and more than most failures, makes us peevish with others. We wreak our disappointment on them as if they were to blame because they were creatures and could not do what God has reserved to Himself alone the right of being able to do. True prayer becomes almost impossible. In this state of perpetual irritation, we become disgusted with ourselves. And this disgust is so little like a humble hatred of ourselves that it is incompatible with it. It is the very antipodes of humility. We must restore peace of some kind to our soul. We must sweeten our disposition by some means

or other. This leads us a step lower. We give in to natural repose. We seek compensation in bodily comforts for what we suffer in spiritual things. Self-indulgence gives us a kind of amiability—spurious indeed, and perhaps only temporary. Yet it serves for the moment and we are content. This is the end of our feeling of weariness. It has not so much torn open our spiritual life as unstitched it. But it has done this completely. The original leaving of our bodily comforts was our first step toward union with God and here we are arrived at them again. Who, then, will dare to leave unwatched, or passively to bear, this insidious feeling of being tired, which comes to such an evil end at last?

We must remember, first of all, that our struggle against spiritual weariness must be equal, whatever the source of the weariness may be; because the danger is equal whatever may be the excuse. We must not be passive. In the next place, we must watch with an exceeding jealousy against all worshipping of health. The encroachments of this idolatry are very insidious. No other angel of darkness simulates an angel of light as well. None can argue so well or talk so reasonably, or so successfully feign the excellences of moderation and discretion. Nevertheless, all spiritual writers agree that it is one of the most common, as well as most fatal enemies of devotion. When it has established itself, weariness is its first-born. Health has, of course, to be considered, because it not only involves our external work, which represents our duties to others, but it also rules our interior life, which is our intercourse with God. On the whole, in cases of doubt, it is safer to decide against health than for it. But the safest thing of all is to follow the dispassionate judgment of others, provided that, on the one hand, our questions are put fairly and are not mere fishings for particular answers, and, on the other, that we have not chosen a guide who, through good nature or indifference, will always ratify the demands of our own softness. Yet, this is hard to do; for, after all, the sick man is the only man, in most cases, who understands what he suffers, better than either priest or physician. Yet we know that if he made this his rule of action

with his body, he would soon be dead; and the case is the same with the treatment of his soul.

It is a custom, which many have practiced with advantage when this weariness has been upon them, to bind themselves by vows for extremely short periods—vows to get up at a certain hour in the morning, or to examine their conscience for a given time before going to bed, or to persevere in that thing, whatever it may be, which the feeling of weariness makes us imagine just then to be impossible. But this is also a rule that can be followed only under advice. We must also regulate our actions very carefully. Punctuality, always a thing of huge importance, in the pursuit of perfection, is now indispensable. We must be quiet and not precipitate, steady and not intermittent. We must deal firmly with ourselves, but it must be a very gentle firmness. We must consider our weariness either as a punishment to be endured reverently, or as a suffering to be borne in union with the Passion of our Blessed Lord. Above all, we must fix our energies courageously on it and not allow ourselves to underrate its importance. What we have already said will surely persuade us to this most cogently. For we have seen that it first of all undoes old and long habits of good; secondly, that it leads to a nausea of spiritual things; and thirdly, that it pushes us to the distinct abandonment of the higher level we took at first, and to the taking of a lower one, which will most probably have to be abandoned in its turn.

But it is a great trial and I wish I could console you more efficaciously under it. It is a very real suffering. Nevertheless, we must either push on or give up the strife. As to this last, I do not say, "Who will dare to do it?" but rather, "Whose love of God will let him do it?" It is cruel to drag a man up and down a room after he has been overdosed with laudanum, while he is moaning with weariness and entreating to be allowed to lie down and sleep. Yet it is one of those cruelties which are a part of the imperiousness of mercy. So we must let ourselves be shaken, and forced onward, and pricked with needles, if need be, and beaten as though we were flagging beasts of burden. I take it for granted

that we are clear about our not doing as much for God as we very well might do. Let us hold on, tired as we are. We shall be less tired when we come to our second wind, if we may be allowed so to name that second fervor which is so often granted to the lukewarm, and which spiritual writers too much ignore. Life is short. The thing is—to be ready to die, and to be free from reproach at that dread hour; and is there one of us who would quite like to die, doing as little for God as we are doing now?

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Simplicity

The spiritual life is a reality, by far the most real of all realities, because it is our intercourse with God on the most momentous of interests. It cannot help being real with a reality which must often be felt as an important and inopportune yoke upon our frivolous nature. Yet, if we are in earnest about saving our souls, we should not look about in the spiritual life for smooth things and easy sayings, but for true things and sincere sayings. Some people pride themselves on their principle of getting out of the way of frightening things and consider it the height of discretion to keep such matters at arm's length and to be very solemnly severe upon books and preachers that profess to deal with them. Such persons are simply insincere. They must be judged after they die, and it is greatly to be suspected that the judgment will throw a somewhat disconsolate light on their eccentric discretion. On the whole, the judgment is an exceedingly awkward time for finding out mistakes, particularly, indiscreet discretions. . . .

We are very much in earnest with God. We desire to advance in His ways so we grapple with this ugly subject of self-deceit and take a very close view of it, believing that the unpleasant operation will be of the greatest service to our souls. In the case of all of us, numbers of graces have been wasted through not meeting with correspondence, and most frequently that want of

correspondence has been attributable to self-deceit. A disease from which almost everybody suffers, and whose consequences may easily be so ruinous, claims an honest investigation from those who desire to be honest with God and self.

Untruthfulness is a very odious thing. It is the most offensive and provoking charge we can make against another. . . . But unfortunately this untruthfulness is not rare. It is as universal as the consequences of the Fall. Thorough truthfulness is the rarest of all phenomena. The grace of terrific austerities and bodily macerations which has characterized some of the saints, the grace to love suffering, the grace of ecstasy, the grace of martyrdom, all these are commoner graces than that of thorough truthfulness. The first step toward being truthful is the knowledge that we are far from it, for out of that knowledge follows the hatred, the determination, and the aim which bear us on toward truthfulness. We must not, therefore, be content with a general admission of guilt but we must go into ourselves and ferret out the whole of the misery and corruption. It is of little use to plunge into this repulsive subject of self-deceit unless we are conscious to ourselves of a manly determination to make a thorough work of it. . . . Furthermore, it is of little use to plunge into it unless we take up, as a standard or ideal, some notion, even though it be a negative one, of Christian simplicity. The acquisition then of this inadequate idea of Christian simplicity shall be our first occupation, and we will try to obtain it by an analysis of its impediments.

Christian simplicity, or holy truthfulness, consists of three things, each of which is a good deal rarer than a black swan is out of Australia. It requires first, that we be truthful with ourselves, secondly that we be truthful with others, and thirdly that we be truthful with God. . . . Now, if we are in earnest in undeceiving ourselves, we must be taking real pains to acquire self-knowledge. But it is not easy to know ourselves. On the contrary, it is the hardest thing in the world. Are we honest in our examinations of conscience? Are we punctual in them? We may fairly suppose there are not many men trying to save their souls,

of whose daily regularities a brief examination of conscience is not one. Now, what is our regularity in this respect, our accuracy, our diligence, and our real view of its importance? If we are not taking pains to know ourselves, we may be quite sure we are not truthful with self. We can hardly be taking pains without knowing it for, unfortunately, this is a matter in which the pains are very unpleasant and it is only wounded men in battle who are sometimes unconscious of unpleasant things.

It is of so much consequence to know ourselves, where religion is concerned, that if we not only do not take pains to know ourselves, but rather get out of the way of self-knowledge, we can hardly blind ourselves to the fact that we are not in earnest about our souls. It is plain enough that many take little pains about it. Idleness is the most natural thing in the world. But who takes pains to remain in ignorance of himself? Nearly every one. There is scarcely a man or woman on the way, as they think, to holiness who does not habitually do this in more ways than one. Here is one way. People go on in a dim, misty, confused manner. They suspect, perhaps, that they do not prepare for confession as carefully as they ought to do. They have a vague feeling that there is neither enough examination, nor enough pains about contrition and that the exuberant graces of the sacrament are certainly realized in a most partial way, and the sacrament itself perhaps risked. They are always intending to look into the matter and never doing it. Some day or other they will but they can never do it today. They are not sure of the evil. The removal of it, therefore, is not a plain duty. For perhaps, after all, on enquiry, there may be found nothing to remove. By shirking the self-knowledge, they keep at arm's length the obviousness of the duty; so that they seem to gain by thus defrauding themselves.

Now, almost everyone has some uncertainty resting on his conscience about some part of his conduct which has to do with the practices of the spiritual life, such as prayer, mortification, sacraments and the like. Thus, a man has a veiled muffled feeling that he is neglecting bodily mortification to such an extent as to

be very unsafe for his soul. Yet he will not call his feeling to account and unmuffle it and see what it is worth. He could do this very easily. See how anyone else could do it for him! Are you all right about bodily mortifications? "I do not feel quite sure about them." True! but it is not exactly a matter to have any doubt about. "Why! it is a long question! There is a great deal to be said." Certainly! there is a good deal to be said about most questions; but why not say it? "Not prepared just now." Well! but is it a matter which will wait? Either you are leading a mortified life, or you are not. Five minutes' honest self-inspection will tell you at once: and if not, you can settle forthwith the amount of change you must make in your present softness and then go on. But no! this is a style of spiritual direction far too matter-of-fact for most of us. Indeed we are by no means clear that it is not rude and unfeeling. We cannot have the plasters pulled off our wounds in this way. There is a certain sort of comfort in a fog, especially for shy men. They are less visible. So we go on with half a dozen grave matters resting unsettled, misty, and unargued, in a kind of unspeakably slow interior court of chancery. But how, with all this, we can think ourselves true or manful, it is not quite easy to see. It is a sad annoyance when others find us out, for it mostly lowers their opinion of us; but the saddest annoyance of all, to our poor nature is to find ourselves out for, if we lose self's good opinion, we are forlorn indeed! The worst of it is that there is a time and place when and where detection is inevitable. A wise option is that which chooses the less disagreeable rather than the more disagreeable.

Here is another way in which people are dishonest with themselves, either from the dislike of exertion, or from a suspicion that investigation will compel them to commit themselves to God, or definitely deny Him something, both of which they are equally anxious to avoid. It is quite common for men to persist in a course of action without being sure of their motives, even with an indistinct suspicion that their motives are not adequate or trustworthy. This is peculiarly the case where charity may pos-

sibly be concerned. There are many instances in which, from what we know of ourselves, it is probable beforehand that some amount of jealousy, dislike, rivalry, triumph, or other unworthiness may mingle with our motives, and thus not only vitiate a whole series of actions, but even be superinducing a new habit of uncharitableness, or strengthening an old one, and also hindering all other growths of grace in the soul so long as this canker is allowed to remain. The same may be said of works of mercy and charitable enterprises in which we engage. If we have the slightest reason to distrust our motives, the slightest reason to doubt whether the glory of God, if not unmingled, be at least uppermost in our hearts, we ought resolutely to scrutinize our motives, not merely because of the ruinous loss of merit which we are incurring, but also because of the positive damage done to our soul, and the destruction of works in it which former operations of grace have constructed.

Do we make our faults a subject of sober and mature reflection? There are times certainly when it is not well to do this, times of temptation, discouragement, and scruple, when our spiritual guides would wisely prohibit our doing so. But, on the whole, must it not be a necessary part of every good man's religious occupations? If our great object is to save souls—if our faults are the sole impediments to this—if, moreover, they are subtle, false-spoken, apt to disguise themselves, expert at putting on the semblance of God,—if, furthermore, they come to life again when they have been killed, and that by the most clever and unexpected resurrections and have such vitality that some of them, certain forms of self-will to wit, can never be put to death even by the saints—if all these *ifs* are true, we shall surely be in bad case if the mature consideration of our faults is not one of the steadiest and most consistent businesses which we transact in the spiritual life. . . .

Once more: there is hardly a man or woman in the world who has not got some corner of self into which he or she fears to venture with a light. The reasons for this may be

as various as the individual souls. Nevertheless, in spite of the variety of reasons, the fact is universal. For the most part we hardly know our own reasons. It is an instinct—one of the quick instincts of corrupt nature. We prophesy to ourselves that if we penetrate into that corner of self, something will have to be done which either our laziness or our immortification would shrink from doing. If we enter that sanctuary, some charm of easy devotion or smooth living will be broken. We shall find ourselves face to face with something unpleasant, something which will perhaps constrain us to all the trouble and annoyance of a complete interior revolution, or else leave us very uncomfortable in conscience. We may perhaps be committed to something higher than our present way of life; and that is out of the question. Religion is yoke enough as it is. So we leave this corner of self curtained off, locked up like a room in a house with disagreeable associations attached to it or like a lumber closet with disorder accumulating but which we have not just now the vigor to grapple with. But do we think that God cannot enter there, except by our unlocking the door, or see anything when He is there unless we hold Him a light? This is one branch of Christian simplicity, to be truthful, and earnest, and real with ourselves.

The second branch of Christian simplicity is to be truthful and earnest and real with others. Now, in order to attain this, we must, first of all, act as little as may be with reference to the opinion of others. There is a great deal of self-will in the world, but very little genuine independence of character. All imitation of others is more or less an untruth. We are ourselves, and we must act as ourselves, and be like ourselves, and consistent with ourselves; and this is hardly what any of us are. We go about like weather-cocks, ascertaining for ourselves and indicating to others the outlying quarters from which the wind comes. We have no ascertained principles of our own. This leads us into endless petty untruthfulnesses. It makes us seem like hypocrites when we are not so; because weakness is apt to look like hypocrisy. No one acts naturally who imitates others; and no one in the long

run is truthful to others who is not natural with others. A discernible self, even if it be an unsatisfactory self, is a grand, genuine, and wholesome truth, with a strange and gracious propensity to be very humble, as truths always are.

In the second place, if we wish to be truthful with others, we must avoid explaining and commenting on our own actions in conversation. For, either we must make conversation like a regular confession, or we must convey an untrue idea of ourselves. Let us take one instance. What is more common for us to say than "I assure you I did such and such a thing entirely because so and so?" Now we know very well that never since we were born have we ever done one single action *entirely* for any one single motive. So that here, quite unconsciously, we may be laying claim to a very high and rare grace, to which only a few even of the canonized saints have attained. A man hardly ever comments on his own actions or explains his own motives without being false. The mere omission of his bad makes the enunciation of his good an untruth. He puts himself into a position from which it is scarcely possible for him to extricate himself without damage to his genuineness and simplicity. Yet, no one called him into that position. It is only once in a thousand times, at least in common affairs of life, that a man is called upon to comment on himself. Nobody wants his comment. People care much less for him either way than he likes to suppose. In truth it is egregious vanity, pompous self-importance, the itch of self-defense, the identifying of personal feeling with the glory of God, or some other absurdity of human littleness which leads him into it. Avoid, therefore, such comments and explanations. "Least said soonest mended" is never more sure than in conversations which turn on self. . . .

Indeed, in the third place, we ought to make self as little as possible the subject of conversation, even in the less dangerous form of straightforward narration. Falsehood comes of it somehow, and the sense of having forfeited grace, and gone down in our own estimation as well as that of others, and (which is more

serious) of having grieved the Holy Ghost. This is so undeniably everybody's experience that it need not be dwelt upon.

In the fourth place, in order to be truthful with others, we should avoid having secrets and still more avoid becoming the depositary of the secrets of others. Nobody will ever be persuaded of this as long as the world lasts. However, truth has to be said, even when the saying of it is too plainly useless. Secrets are nearly the most mischievous things in the world and almost the most unnecessary. How few things there are which really need to be secrets! How many fewer which, being secrets, need be confided to others! Unless clear duty is there to sanctify it, he who confides a secret to another has laid a burden on him, led him into temptation, fettered his childlike liberty of spirit, and impaired the presence of God in his soul. This is a serious indictment. But secrets are the garments which, of all others, self-importance most affects. To be told a secret is the most delicate of flatteries. The teller and the listener both grow in their own esteem and in each other's. They become "larger than the other beavers," which is always a pleasant operation to vain nature, although sometimes, as in Hiawatha, entailing uncomfortable consequences. Depend upon it, there is nothing in the world that will more effectually entangle you in unreality than an unnecessary secret. Great-minded men have few secrets.

We must remember also that the want of truthfulness with others reacts upon ourselves in the way of blinding us with regard to our own motives and characters. Those who deceive others always end in deceiving themselves. Thus we shall never be truthful with ourselves unless we are also truthful with others.

Thirdly and lastly, simplicity requires that we should be truthful with God. It is almost startling to speak of such a thing, because of the horror of supposing an opposite line of conduct possible. Yet alas! it is not only possible but common. We know how God sees through and through us. We know how bare and odiously intelligible to Him are all the subterfuges of our deceit and misery. We know how His eye rests upon us incessantly, and

takes us all in, and searches us out, and, as it were, burns us with His holy gaze. His perfections environ us with the most awful nearness, flooding us with insupportable light. To His eye, there is not only no concealment, there is not even a softening shade, or a distance to subdue the harshness and veil the unworthiness. Yet for all this, to be straightforward with God is neither an easy nor a common grace. Oh, with what unutterable faith must we believe in our own falsehood when we can feel it to be anything like a shelter in the presence of the all-seeing God!

We take liberties with Him, for want of a holy fear. In unprepared petitions, in slovenly sacraments, in cursory self-examinations, in distracted meditations, in outward posture, in inward recollection, in the way in which we postpone Him for other things, we make free with His immense majesty. We try to hide from Him our want of filial confidence. We know how stupid the attempt is. We are well aware that we cannot hide from Him; but we keep our knowledge within us and will not let it come up to the surface in the shape of practice. It is a shocking thought to be unreal with God; yet we are all of us so to a frightening extent. God help us! We are living in a world of the most bewildered and complicated untruthfulness; but it is to be our eternal joy to stand revealed in the blaze of unutterable Truth and revel in our want of concealment forever!

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Importance of Little Things in Religion

We must be on our guard against the very little temptations, or such as we should call little. For things must have comparative magnitudes, even where our souls are concerned. It is no uncommon thing for a man who has resisted great temptations to fall in little ones. This is very intelligible. Wherever there is dignity in an action or a suffering we can the better brace ourselves up to it; for we can draw largely upon nature as well as grace. Self-love likes dignity, and we will go through endless pain, as if it were

an insensible thing in order to obtain it. Hence comes the importance of little things in religion. Nature has less to do with them, and so they rivet our union with God more closely. The conversion of souls, works of mercy on a grand scale, visiting prisons, preaching, hearing confessions, and even establishing religious institutions, are comparatively easy works when put by the side of exactitude in daily duties, observation of petty rules, minute custody of the senses, kind words and modest exterior which preach the presence of God. We gain more supernatural glory in little things, because more fortitude is required, as they are continuous, uninterrupted, and with no dignity about them to spur us on. All the strength we require must be found within. We have no outward place or praise of men, to rest our lever on, and furthermore heroism in little things is more a matter of endurance than of action. It is a perpetual constraint.

Moreover, our spirit is more effectually taken captive in little things. Its defeats are more frequent. The very continuity of the actions forms a linked chain, which extends to many things. No attachment is to be merely natural, no word unweighed, no step precipitate, no pleasure enjoyed sensually, no joy to evaporate in dissipation, the heart never to rest on carnal tenderness alone, no action to have its spring in self-will. We tremble at such seeming impossibilities of perfection; yet it is only the perfection of little things! Then again, there is something so humbling and secret in little things. Who knows if we count our words, or what feelings we are curbing? God will let us fall in these very respects to hide us more in Himself, and from the eyes of men. We carry the mortification of Jesus about us unseen. It is a slow martyrdom of love. God is the only spectator of our agony. Nay, we ourselves find it hard to realize that we are doing purely for God such a multitude of trivial things; hence we have no room for vain-glory, no fallacious support of conscious human rectitude.

But in these little things we not only gain more glory for ourselves, but we give more glory to God. We show more esteem for Him in them; for there must necessarily be more pure motive

and sheer faith in little than in great things. Great things by their greatness often hide God; and at best the esteem in great things is mostly divided between God and the glory of the action, and so the whole work is tainted. Whereas the littleness and vileness of small things, their apparent facility and men's contempt for them, leave the soul face to face with God in the disenchanting twilight of interior mortification. But it is not merely esteem. More actual tribute is paid to God in little things. In great things we have more help given us, and we give God less because we have to labor less. The abundance of grace, the sweetness of it, and the animation of spirit from the pursuit of a great object, are three things which lessen our own labor. Yet it is our own toil that is the real tribute to God, just as dry prayers are said to be more meritorious than sweet ones. In great things too we seldom have the liberty of acting as we please. In little ones we have, and we pay that liberty away every hour to God as a tribute of fidelity and love.

But esteem and tribute are not all. We sacrifice more to God in little things. We think little of little things, and so we make the sacrifice, not in swelling thoughts of mightiness, but out of a subdued feeling of our own utter nothingness, and of the immensity of our being allowed to make any sacrifice to God at all. We sacrifice also our self-interest, which is not attracted by anything in these ignoble victims; and so we seek God only, and put aside the pursuit of praise and self. We forego also the enjoyment of strenuous manly action; for what manliness, as men count things, is there in regularity, littleness, exactness, and obscurity? Yet this is the only road to solid virtue. It was not what we read of in the saints that made them saints: it was what we do not read of them that enabled them to be what we wonder at while we read. Words cannot tell the abhorrence nature has of the piecemeal captivity of little constraints. And as to little temptations, I can readily conceive a man having the grace to be roasted over a slow fire for our dearest Mother's Immaculate Conception or the Pope's Supremacy, who would not have the

grace to keep his temper in a theological conversation on either of those points of the Catholic faith.

—*Growth in Holiness*

Worldliness

The question of worldliness is a very difficult one. . . . There must be some attempt to explain the discrepancy between what we see and what we are taught. The explanation is to be found in what Christians call worldliness. It is this which stands in the way of God's honor, this which defrauds Him of the tribute due to Him from His creatures, this which even blinds their eyes to His undeniable rights and prerogatives. How God's own world stands between Himself and the rational soul, how friendship with it is enmity with Him—indeed an account of the matter must be gone into, in order to show first that the influence of the world does account for the non-reception of right views about God, and secondly, that the world is in no condition to be called as a witness, because of the essential falsehood of its character. This identical falsehood about God is its very life, energy, significance, and condemnation. The right view of God is not unreal because the world ignores it. On the contrary, it is because it is real that the unreal world ignores it, and the world's ignoring it is, so far forth, an argument in favor of the view.

The question of worldliness is implicated in the two objections; namely, the difficulty of salvation and the fewness to be saved. If it is easy to be saved, whence comes the grave semblance of its difficulty? If the majority of adult Catholics are actually saved, because salvation is easy, why is it necessary to draw so largely on the unknown regions of the deathbed, in order to make up our majority? Why should not salvation be almost universal, if the pardon of sin is so easy, grace so abundant, and all that is wanted is a real earnestness about the interests of our souls? If you acknowledge, as you do, that the look of men's lives, even the lives of believers, is not as if they were going to

be saved, and that they are going to be saved in reality in spite of appearances, what is the explanation of these appearances, when the whole process is so plain and easy? To all this the answer is that sin is a partial explanation, the devil is a partial explanation, but that the grand secret lies in worldliness. That is the chief disturbing force, the prime counteracting power. It is this mainly which keeps down the number of the saved; it is this which makes the matter seem so difficult which is intrinsically so easy; nay, it is this which is a real difficulty, though not such an overwhelming one as to make salvation difficult as a whole. Plainly then, the phenomenon of worldliness must be considered here, else it will seem as if an evident objection, and truly the weightiest of all objections had not been taken into account. . . .

This inquiry into worldliness will truthfully and naturally prepare us for the great conclusion of the whole inquiry, namely, the personal love of God is the only legitimate development of our position as creatures, and at the same time the means by which salvation is rendered easy, and the multitude of the saved augmented. For it will be found that the dangers of worldliness are at once so great and so peculiar, that nothing but a personal love of our Creator will rescue us from them, enable us to break with the world, and to enter into the actual possession of the liberty of the sons of God.

Oh, it is a radiant land—this wide outspread many-colored mercy of our Creator! but we must be content for a while now to pass out of this kindling sunshine into another land of most ungenial darkness, in the hope that we shall come back heavy-laden with booty for God's glory, and knowing how to prize the sunshine more than ever. There is a hell already upon earth; there is something which is excommunicated from God's smile. It is not altogether matter, nor yet altogether spirit. It is not man only, nor Satan only, nor is it exactly sin. It is an infection, an inspiration, an atmosphere, a life, a coloring matter, a pageantry, a fashion, a taste, a witchery, an impersonal but a very recognizable system. None of these names suit it, and all of them suit it.

Scripture calls it "The World." God's mercy does not enter into it. All hope of its reconciliation with Him is absolutely and eternally precluded. Repentance is incompatible with its existence. The sovereignty of God has laid the ban of the empire on it; and a holy horror ought to seize us when we think of it. Meanwhile, its power over the human creation is terrific, its presence ubiquitous, its deceitfulness incredible. It can find a home in every heart beneath the poles, and it embraces with impartial affection both happiness and misery. It is wider than the Catholic Church, and is masterful, lawless and intrusive within it. It cannot be damned, because it is not a person, but it will perish in the general conflagration, and so its tyranny be over, and its place know it no more. We are living in it, breathing it, acting under its influences, being cheated by its appearances, and unwarily admitting its principles. Is it not of the least importance to us that we should know something of this huge evil creature, this monstrous seabird of evil, which flaps its wings from pole to pole, and frightens the nations into obedience by its discordant cries?

But we must not be deceived by this description. The transformations of the spirit of the world are among its most wonderful characteristics. It has its gentle voice, its winning manners, its insinuating address, its aspect of beauty and attraction; and the lighter its foot and the softer its voice, the more dreadful is its approach. It is by the firesides of rich and poor, in happy homes where Jesus is named, in gay hearts which fain would never sin. In the chastest domestic affections, it can hide its poison. In the very sunshine of external nature, in the combinations of the beautiful elements—it is somehow even there. The glory of the wind-swept forest and the virgin forest of the Alpine summits have a taint in them of the spirit of the world. It can be dignified as well. It can call to order sin which is not respectable. It can propound wise maxims of public decency, and inspire wholesome regulations of police. It can open the churches and light the candles on the altar, and entone *Te Deums* to the

Majesty on high. It is often prominently and almost pedantically, on the side of morality. Then again, it has passed into the beauty of art, into the splendor of dress, into the magnificence of furniture. Or, again, there it is, with high principles on its lips, discussing the religious vocation of some youth, and praising God and sanctity, while it urges discreet delay, and less self-trust, and more considerate submissiveness to those who love him, and have natural rights to his obedience. It can sit on the benches of senates, and hide in the pages of good books. And yet, all the while, it is the same huge evil creature which was described above. Have we not reason to fear?

—*Creator and Creature*

Two Views of the World

It is hard to live in a place and avoid the spirit of it. It is hard to live in the world and avoid worldliness. Yet this is what we have to do. The world we cannot leave till God summons us; but worldliness, which is the spirit of the world, should not be allowed to infect us. As the smell of fire had not passed upon the garments of the three children in the burning fiery furnace, so must the odor of worldliness not pass upon our souls. But to the avoiding of worldliness, no help is more efficacious than having a right and fixed view of the world. There are two views of the world which Christians may take, two views which are actually taken by those who are striving to serve God and to love Him purely. Which of these two views a man takes depends partly upon his associations, partly upon his natural character, and partly upon the circumstances of his vocation; and his spiritual life will be found to be considerably modified by the particular view which he is led to take. Some take a very gloomy view of the world. To them it seems to be altogether bad, wholly evil, irredeemably lost. Everything is danger; for there is sin everywhere. All its roses have thorns under the leaves. There is a curse upon everything belonging to it. Its joys are only other forms of

melancholy. Its sunshine is a mockery; its beautiful scenery is a deceit; the soothingness of its domestic affections a snare. Its life is an incessant death. We have no right to smile at anything. The world is so dark that it is even a perpetual partial eclipse of God. If the present is miserable, let us delay upon it; for in misery we shall find food for our souls. If it is joyous, let us rush from it into the forebodings of a future, when all this world and the fashion of it will be burned up with fire. Let us speak low, lest the devil hear us, and use his knowledge to our destruction. Let us live as ancient monarchs lived, in daily fear of poison in every dish. A funeral on a wet day in a disconsolate churchyard, this is the type of the minds who take this view.

The other view is the very opposite of all this. It is the bright view. Those who take it see all creation lying before them with the luster of God's benediction on it. It is the earth on which Jesus was born, and where Mary lived. It marvels at the number of exquisite pleasures with which it is strewn, so very few of which, comparatively, are sins. The innocent attachment of earthly love are to such men helps to love God the better. Natural beauty supernaturalizes their minds. The sunshine makes them better men. God's perfections are seen everywhere written in hieroglyphics over the world. Kindness is so abundant, nobility of heart so plentiful, the joys of home so pure, yet so attractive, the successes of the Gospel so infinitely consoling, all things, in fact, so much better on trial than they seemed, that the world appears a happy place, and missing but a little, so little it is sad to think how little, of being a holy place also, holy from the very abundance of its pure happiness. At every turn there are radiant fountains of joy leaping up to meet us. Each day, like the cystus, has a thousand new blossoms to show; it lays them down when evening comes, and the next morning, it has as gay a show of flowers as ever. Even adverse things are wonderfully tempered in the present, while in the past they have such a pathetic golden light upon them that the memory of them is one of our best treasures, and we would not for worlds not have

suffered them; and as to any evil in the future, there is such an inextinguishable light of joy within us that we simply disbelieve it. The clouds fly before us as we go. Music sounds around our path. And as to cares, they find themselves so little at home with us, that, when we come to the night, "they fold up their tents like the Arabs, and as silently steal away."

—*Creator and Creature*

Our Forgetfulness That We Are Creatures

The phenomena of worldliness may all be resolved into a forgetfulness that we are creatures. There is no look about the life of Dives that he remembered he was a creature. There might be, mingled with his characteristic good nature which made him love his brothers so much and give alms to Lazarus, some confused notions of duty to a Creator; but, as for any abiding sense of his being a creature, there was none. He solved the problem of the possibility of these two forgetfulnesses being separated, that of having a Creator and that of being a creature. It is this forgetfulness which is the fountain of almost all sins of omission. A worldly man never looks like a man who lives as having to give an account of himself to a higher power. Anything which should evince a sense of an invisible world would be incongruous in his ordinary conduct; and, if from early associations or natural timorousness of character, he should betray any such sense, it would instantly take the form of superstition rather than that of religion. When the devil tempts a man to a great sin of passion, such as murder, or sensuality at last beguiles a man to relapse into his intemperance, in neither of these cases does he forget that he is a creature. Indeed, it is his advertance to the law of his Creator which give the malice to the sin. But there is no struggle in worldliness. It is a false faith, a false religion. It does not recognize the rights of the Creator nor occupy itself with the duties of the creature. It begins with self, and ends with self, and, if compelled to lodge an appeal outside itself, it appeals

to the judgments of human respect. Wherever there is worldliness, there is this forgetfulness that we are creatures; and wherever there is this forgetfulness that we are creatures, there is worldliness.

When a man's sympathies are with a disloyal State rather than with the Holy See, there is worldliness. The world is preferred before the Church. When men object to the doctrine of religious vocation, and without other reasons than a certain instinct try to hinder their children from entering religious orders, there is worldliness. The one work of the creature, to do the Creator's will, is overlooked or unacknowledged. When men are ashamed of their religion before heretics, especially of its distinctive practices and unpopular doctrines, there is worldliness. The creature forgets himself, and makes himself the standard of truth. Wherever men, who are not to their own sensible cost taking up the cross daily and following Christ, inveigh against religious enthusiasm or the want of moderation in piety, there is worldliness. The creature wants to limit the service of the Creator. When men do not give alms, or give them scantily, or give them in an eccentric or peculiar way, there is worldliness. The creature either claims as his own what he only holds at the good pleasure of his Creator, or he claims to satisfy his own whim and caprice in the way in which he pays it back to his Creator. Indeed, all developments of worldliness exhibit some obliquity in a man's perception of the true relations between the Creator and creature. Ought we not, then, to ask ourselves seriously if we have any right to be so little afraid of worldliness as we are? If an evil is universal, if it is almost imperceptible, if it is generally fatal, if we know it to be in the middle of us, and, if not suspecting that we have it is, or may be, one of the worst symptoms of our having it, does not prudence suggest to us almost an excess in caution, almost a nervousness of fear, almost a fancifulness of apprehension? Is it well that we should be so calm and cool? Is it certain that our calmness and coolness are not actual proofs of the disease? Worldliness requires only one condition for its success,

that we should not fear it. He who fears God must also fear the world, and he who fears the world need never fear that he has lost the fear of God.

—*Creator and Creature*

Habitual Sins of Omission

The outward aspect of worldliness is not sin. Its character is negative. It abounds in omissions. Yet, throughout the Gospels our Saviour seems purposely to point to it rather than to open sin. When the young man turned away, our Lord's remark was "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven." But the very fact of our Lord's thus branding worldliness with His special reprobation is enough to show that it is in reality deeply sinful, hatefully sinful. It is a life without God in the world. It is a continual ignoring of God, a continual quiet contempt of His rights, an insolent abatement in the service which He claims from His creatures. Self is set up instead of God. The canons of human respect are more looked up to than the Divine Commandments. God is very little adverted to. He is passed over. The very thought of Him soon ceases to make the worldly man uncomfortable. Indeed, all his chief objections to religion, if he thought much about the matter, would be found a repose on his apprehension of it as restless and uncomfortable. But all this surely must represent an immensity of interior mortal sin. Can a man habitually forget God, and be in a state of habitual grace? Can he habitually prefer purple garments and sumptuous fare to the service of his Creator, and be free from mortal sin? Can he make up a life for himself, even of the world's sinless enjoyments, such as eating, drinking, and marrying, and will not the mere omission of God from it be enough to constitute him in a state of deadly sin? At that rate, a moral atheist is more acceptable to God than a poor sinner honestly but feebly fighting with some habit of vice, to which his nature and his past offenses set so strongly that he can hardly lift himself up. At that rate,

the Pharisees in the Gospel would be the patterns for our imitation, rather than the publicans and sinners; or at least they would be as safe. Or shall we say that faith is enough to save us without charity? If a man only believes rightly, let him eat and drink and be gaily clothed, and let him care for nothing else, and at least that exclusive love of creatures, that omission of the Creator, provided only that it issues in no other outward acts than his fine dinners and expensive clothes, shall never keep his soul from heaven. His purple and his sumptuous feasting shall be his beatific vision here, and then his outward morality shall by God's mercy hand him on to his second Beatific Vision, the Vision of the beauty of God and the eternal ravishment of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity! Can this be true?

Yet, on the other hand, we may not make into sins what God has not made sins. How is this? Oh, it is the awful world of inward sin which is the horror of all this worldliness! It is possession, worse far than diabolical possession because at once more hideous and more complete. It is the interior irreligiousness, the cold pride, the hardened heart, the depraved sense, the real unbelief, the more than implicit hatred of God which makes the soul of the worldly man an actual, moral, and intellectual hell on earth, hidden by an outward show of faultless proprieties, which only make it more revolting to the Eye that penetrates the insulting disguise. The secret sins moreover of the worldly are a very sea of iniquity. Their name is legion; they cannot be counted. Almost every thought is sin because of the inordinate worship of self that is in it. Almost every step is sin, because it is treading under foot some ordinance of God. It is a life without prayer, a life without desire of heaven, a life without fear of hell, a life without love of God, a life without any supernatural habits at all. Is not hell the most natural transition from such a life as this? Heaven is not a sensual paradise. God is the joy, and the beauty, and the contentment there; all is for God, all is from God, all to God, all in God, all round God as the beautiful central fire about which His happy creatures cluster in amazement and

delight. Whereas in worldliness God is the discomfort of the whole thing, an intrusion, an unseasonable thought, an inharmonious presence like a disagreeable uninvited guest, irritating and fatiguing us by the simple demand His presence makes on our sufferance and our courtesy. O surely such a man has sin in his veins instead of blood!

Worldliness, then, is a life of secret sins. It is such an irresistible tendency to sin, such a successful encouragement of it, such a genial climate, such a collection of favorable circumstances, such an amazing capability of sin, that it breeds actual sins, regularly formed and with all the theological requirements by millions and millions. . . .

Still we must remember that on the whole there are two characteristics which always distinguish sins of worldliness from sins of the passions, or sins of direct diabolical temptation. The respectability which worldliness affects leads it rather to satisfy itself in secret sins. Indeed, its worship of self, its predilection for an easy life would hinder its embarking in sins which take trouble, time, and forethought, or which run risks of disagreeable consequences, and therefore would keep it confined within a sphere of secret sins. And in the next place, its love of comfort makes it so habitually disinclined to listen to the reproaches of conscience, or the teasing solicitations of grace, that it passes into the state of a seared conscience, a deadened moral sense, with a speed which is unknown even to cruelty or sensuality.

—*Creator and Creature*

The World Whose Friendship Is Enmity With God

It is this world which we have to fight against throughout the whole of our Christian course. Our salvation depends upon our unforgiving enmity against it. It is not so much that it is a sin as that it is the capability of all sins, the air sin breathes, the light by which it sees to do its work, the hot-bed which propagates and forces it, the instinct which guides it, the power which

animates it. For a Christian to look at, it is dishearteningly complete. It is a sort of catholic church of the powers of darkness. It has laws of its own, and tastes and principles of its own, literature of its own, a missionary spirit, a compact system, and it is a consistent whole. It is a counterfeit of the Church of God, and in the most implacable antagonism to it. The doctrines of the faith, the practices and devotions of pious persons, the system of the interior life, the mystical and contemplative world of the Saints, with all these it is at deadly war. And so it must be. The view which the Church takes of the world is distinct and clear and far from flattering to its pride. It considers the friendship of the world as enmity with God. It puts all the world's affairs under its feet, either as of no consequence, or at least of every secondary importance. It has great faults to find with the effeminacy of the literary character, with the churlishness of the mercantile character, with the servility of the political character, and even with the inordinateness of the domestic character. It provokes the world by looking on progress doubtingly, and with what appears a very inadequate interest, and there is quiet faith in its contempt for the world extremely irritating to this latter power.

The world, on the contrary, thinks that it is going to last forever. It almost assumes that there are no other interests but its own, or that if there are, they are either of no consequence, or troublesome and in the way. It thinks that there is nothing like itself anywhere, that religion was made for its convenience, merely to satisfy a want, and must not forget itself, or if it claims more, must be put down as a rebel, or chased away as a grumbling beggar; and finally it is of the opinion that, of all contemptible things, spirituality is the most contemptible, cowardly, and little. Thus, the Church and the world are incompatible and must remain so to the end.

We cannot have a better instance of the uncongeniality of the world and the spirit of the Gospel, than the difference in their estimate of prosperity. All those mysterious woes which our Lord

denounced against wealth, have their explanation in the dangers of worldliness. It is the peculiar aptitude of wealth, and pomp, and power to harbor the unholy spirit of the world, to combine with it, and transform themselves into it, which called forth the thrilling malediction of our Lord. Prosperity may be a blessing from God, but it may easily become the triumph of the world. And for the most part, the absence of chastisement is anything but a token of God's love. When prosperity is a blessing, it is generally a condescension to our weakness. Those are fearful words: "Thou hast already received thy reward"; yet, how many prosperous men there are, the rest of whose lives will keep reminding us of them; the tendency of prosperity itself is to wean the heart from God, and fix it on creatures. It gives us a most unsupernatural habit of esteeming others according to their success. As it increases, so anxiety to keep it increases also, and makes men restless, selfish, and irreligious; and at length it superinduces a kind of effeminacy of character, which unfits them for the higher and more heroic virtues of the Christian character. This is but a sample of the different way in which the Church and the world reason.

Now, it is this world which, far more than the devil, far more than the flesh, yet in union with both, makes the difficulty we find in obeying God's commandments, or following His counsels. It is this which makes earth such a place of struggle and of exile. Proud, exclusive, anxious, hurried, fond of comforts, coveting popularity, with an offensive ostentation of prudence, it is this worldliness which hardens the hearts of men, stops their ears, blinds their eyes, vitiates their taste, and ties their hands so far as the things of God are concerned. Let it be true that salvation is easy, and that by far the greater number of Catholics are saved, it is still unhappily true that the relations of the Creator and the creature, as put forward in this treatise, are not so universally or so practically acknowledged as they ought to be. Why is this? Sin is a partial answer. The devil is another partial answer. But I believe that worldliness has got to answer for a

great deal of sin and for a great deal of devil, besides a whole deluge of iniquity of its own, which is perpetually debasing good works, hindering perfection, preparing materials for sin, assisting the devil in his assaults, and working with execrable assiduity against sacraments and grace. The world is forever lowering the heavenly life of the Church. If there ever was an age in which this was true, it is the present. One of the most frightening features of our condition is that we are so little frightened of the world. The world itself has brought this about. Even spiritual books are chiefly occupied with the devil and the flesh; and certain of the capital sins, such as envy and sloth, no longer hold the prominent places which they held in the systems of the elder ascetics; and yet they are just those vices which contain most of the ungodly spirit of the world. The very essence of worldliness seems to consist in its making us forget that we are creatures; and the more this view is reflected upon, the more correct will it appear.

—*Creator and Creature*

The Spirit of a Disobedient Creation

Let us try to learn more definitely what the world is, the world in a scripture sense. A definition is too short, a description is too vague. God never created it; how then does it come here? There is no land, outside the creation of God, which could have harbored this monster, who now usurps so much of this beautiful planet, on which Jesus was born and died, and from which He and His sinless Mother rose to heaven. It seems to be a sort of spirit which has risen up from a disobedient creation, as if the results and after-consequences of all sins that ever were, rested in the atmosphere, and loaded it with some imperceptible but highly powerful miasma. It cannot be a person, and yet it seems as if it possessed both a mind and a will, which, on the whole, are very consistent, so as to disclose what might appear to be a very perfect self-consciousness. It is painless in its operations, and

unerring too; and, just as the sun bids the lily be white and the rose red, and they obey without an effort, standing side by side with the same aspect and in the same soil, so this spirit of the world brings forth colors and shapes and scents in our different actions, without the process being cognizable to ourselves. The power of mesmerism on the reluctant will is a good type of the power of this spirit of the world upon ourselves. It is like grace, only that it is contradictory.

But it has not always the same power. If the expression may be forgiven, there have been times when the world was less worldly than usual; and this looks as if it were something which the existing generations of men always gave out from themselves, a kind of magnetism of varying strengths and different properties. As Satan is sometimes bound, so it pleases God to bind the world sometimes. Or He thunders and the atmosphere is cleared for awhile, and the times are healthy and the Church lifts her head and walks quicker. But, on the whole, its power seems to be increasing with time. In other words, the world is getting more worldly. Civilization develops it immensely and progress helps it on, and multiplies its capabilities. In the matter of worldliness, a highly civilized time is to a comparatively ruder time what the days of machinery are to those of hand-labor.We are not speaking of sin; that is another idea, and brings in fresh considerations; we are speaking only of worldliness. If the characteristics of modern times go on developing with the extreme velocity and herculean strength which they promise now, we may expect (just what prophecy would lead us to anticipate) that the end of the world and the reign of anti-Christ would be times of the most tyrannical worldliness.

This spirit also has its characteristics of time and place. The worldliness of one century is different from that of another. Now it runs toward ambition in the upper classes and discontent in the lower. Now to money-making, luxury, and lavish expenditure. One while it sets toward grosser sins; another while toward wickedness of a more refined description; and another while it will

tolerate nothing but educated sin. It also has periodical epidemics and accessions of madness, though at what intervals, or whether by the operation of any law, must be left to the philosophy of history to decide. Certain it is that ages have manias, the source of which it is difficult to trace, but under which whole communities and sometimes nations exhibit symptoms of diabolical possession. Indeed, on looking back, it would appear that every age, as if an age were an individual and had an individual life, had been subject to some vertigo of its own, by which it may be almost known in history. Very often, the phenomena, such as those of the French Revolution, seem to open out new depths in human nature, or to betoken the presence of some preternatural influences. Then again, ages have panics, as if some attribute of God came near to the world, and cast a deep shadow over its spirit, making men's hearts quail for fear.

This spirit is further distinguished by the evidences which it presents of a fixed view and a settled purpose. It is capricious, but, for all that, there is nothing about it casual, accidental, fortuitous. It is well instructed for its end, inflexible in its logic, and making directly, no matter through what opposing medium, to its ultimate results. Indeed, it is obviously informed with the wisdom and subtlety of Satan. It is his greatest capability of carrying on his war against God. Like a parasite disease, it fixes on the weak places in men, pandering both to mind and flesh, but chiefly to the former. It is one of those three powers to whom such dark pre-eminence is given, the world, the flesh, and the devil; and among these three, it seems to have a kind of precedence given to it by the way in which our Lord speaks of it in the Gospel, though the line of its diplomacy has been to have itself less thought of and less dreaded than the other two; and unhappily, for the interests of God and the welfare of souls, it has succeeded. It is then pre-eminent among the enemies of God. Hence the place which it occupies in Holy Scripture. It is the world which hated Christ, the world which cannot receive the Spirit, the world that loves its own, the world that rejoices be-

cause Christ has gone away, the world which He overcame, the world for which He would not pray, the world that by wisdom knew not God, the world that passeth away with its lusts, the world which they who are born of God overcome, or, as the Apocalypse calls it, the world which goes wandering after the beast. Well then might Saint James come to his energetic conclusion: "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God." It is remarkable also that Saint John, the chosen friend of the Incarnate Word, and the Evangelist of His Divinity, should be the one of the inspired writers who speaks most often and most emphatically about the world as if the spirit of Jesus found something especially revolting to it in the spirit of the world.

—*Creator and Creature*

Worldliness Hides Its Real Malice

When our Blessed Lord describes the days before the Flood, and again those which shall precede the end of the world, He portrays them rather as times of worldliness than of open sin. Men were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and He says no more. Now, none of these things were wrong in themselves. We can eat and drink, as the apostle teaches us, to the glory of God, and marriage was a divine institution at the time of the Flood, and is now a Christian Sacrament. In the same way, when He describes the life of the only person whom the gospel narrative follows into the abode of the lost, He sums it up as being clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasting sumptuously every day. Here again there is nothing directly sinful in the actions which He names. It surely cannot be a mortal sin to have fine linen, nor will a man lose the state of grace because he feasts sumptuously every day, provided that no other sins follow in the train of this soft life. The malice of it all is in its worldliness, in the fact that this was all or nearly all the lives of those before the Flood, of those before the days of anti-Christ, and of

the unhappy Dives. Life began and ended in worldliness. There was nothing for God. It was comprised in the pleasures of the world, it rested in them, it was satisfied in them. Its characteristic was sins of omission. Worldliness might almost be defined to be a state of habitual sins of omission. The devil urges men on to great positive breaches of the divine commandments. The passions of the flesh impel sinners to give way to their passions by such dreadful sins as catch the eyes of men and startle them by their iniquity. Worldliness only leads to these things occasionally and by accident. It neither scandalizes others nor frightens the sinner himself. This is the very feature of it which, rightly considered, ought to be so terrifying. The reaction of a great sin, or the shame which follows it are often pioneers of grace. They give self-love such a serious shock that, under the influence of it, men return to God. Worldliness hides from the soul its real malice and keeps at arm's length from it some of the most persuasive motives to repentance. Thus, the Pharisees are depicted in the Gospel as being eminently worldly. It is worldliness, not immorality, which is put before us. There is even much of moral decency, much of respectable observance, much religious profession; and yet, when our Blessed Saviour went among them, they were further from grace than the publicans and sinners. They had implicit hatred of God in their hearts already, which became explicit as soon as they saw Him. The Magdalen, the Samaritan, the woman taken in adultery—it was these who gathered round Jesus, attracted by His sweetness, and touched by the grace which went out from Him. The Pharisees only grew more and more haughty, more self-opinionated, until they ended by the greatest of all sins, the crucifixion of our Lord. The selfish necessities of worldliness drive it at last into open sin, for the most part sins more awfully and more inpenitently than even the unbridled passion of our nature. So again, there was the young man who had great possessions, and who loved Jesus when he saw Him, and wished to follow Him. He was a religious man, and with humble scrupulosity observed the commandments of God;

but when our Lord told him to sell and give the price to the poor, and to follow Him, he turned away sorrowful, and was found unequal to such a blessed vocation. Now, his refusing to sell his property was surely not a mortal sin. It does not appear that our Lord considered him to have sinned by his refusal. It was the operation of worldliness. We do not know what the young man's future was; but a sad cloud of misgivings must hang over the memory of him whom Jesus invited to follow Him, and who turned away. Is he looking now in heaven upon that Face, from whose mild beauty he so sadly turned away on earth?

—*Creator and Creature*

Disclosures of a Hidden God

God's operations are for the most part accompanied by secrecy. He does not call witnesses, nor display Himself on the theater of the open world. Littleness is another of their characteristics. They are often what the foolishness of our wisdom would have pronounced unworthy of the heavenly Majesty. Their propensity is to lowliness, to fix themselves on what creatures value least, and consider least delectable. Almost always the first act of omnipotence is to reduce itself to an apparent helplessness. The Most High seems anxious to forego what we may call the advantages of His divinity, and to appear as if He were only taking His chance with a crowd of other agents and forces in creation. It is as if He disdained to govern by the strong attractions of power, and preferred to put on the disguise of the sweetest and most piteous persuasion. The Divine Manifestations are almost always surrounded by ignominy. They do not of themselves strike respect and reverence into the world's heart. On the contrary, they are peculiarly liable to be mistaken and misunderstood; and there is something about them which inspires fallen men with a suspicion and dislike which a steady contemplation of their apparent helplessness fixes at last into contempt. Lastly, they have, with hardly any exceptions, the

further characteristic of seeming to put the Creator completely in the power of His creatures. Our dearest Lord in the power of Herod and his brutal soldiery, a butt for rude military buffoonery in the courtyard of the tyrant's palace, is truly an awful picture of God in His own creation. He has given men His creation to use and abuse at will. He left them to do what they pleased with His law. He sent them His Son, as He had sent prophets before time, and they wreaked upon Him every kind of contumely and hate. His Written Word, His Holy Church —His marvelous Sacraments—they are completely surrendered to men, either to their reverence or their sacrilege, their acceptance or their rejection, their patronage or their persecution. Thus secrecy, littleness, helplessness, ignominy, and being at the mercy of creatures, are the five laws of the Divine Interference in the world; and assisted by grace, we can almost get a habit of seeing God everywhere by the application of these laws. They form partly a theological and partly a spiritual instinct. What it concerns us particularly now to remark is, that these five laws include nearly all the infidel and heretical objections to the Blessed Sacrament, that the Blessed Sacrament does not stand alone in being open to them, that the Blessed Sacrament is exactly the same kind of manifestation of God, and the same sort of Presence, as He vouchsafes in matter, mind, morals, theology, history, and the Church, and finally that the Blessed Sacrament exhibits these laws in the most vivid and peculiar manner, and thus concentrates upon itself all the light, and divine beauty, and heavenly secrecy that is anywhere in the world, and that it is the exemplar and most finished and intensely godlike height of Creation and Redemption, of nature and of grace. It is the culminating point and divine coronation of Creative Power, of Providential Wisdom, and of Redeeming Love.

Thus we look through the history of the world, and keep close to the footsteps of God as He moves among the nations and the ages, hiding Himself among them, and by contrary ways leading them softly and firmly to His ends, we shall track His presence

everywhere by outward appearances of humiliation and seeming weakness. When His saints arise to serve Him, they are instantly and on that account a butt for ridicule and ill-treatment; their likeness to the Creator makes them to be regarded as the off-scourings of creation; and they serve in their lives and in their deaths as the victims for the worst passions of cruel men, which they conquer only by succumbing to them. Wherever God is in history, there we see Him abandoned by His creatures, as if there were some repulsion, some centrifugal force in Him who is the center of minds and souls and lives. He makes a solitude before Him as He goes. He cannot get Himself known, or loved, or believed in. Everywhere and always a theater is more than a match for a Church, a gay city for a dull convent, the civil power for the ecclesiastical. Men would rather be enslaved by the state than owe their emancipation to the Church. God is on one side, the world on the other; and blood, rank, money, talent, influence, on the whole are not with Him. Nay, ever and anon He must come into actual contact with His creatures, and then He has nothing to do but suffer bold ill-treatment; and for the most part the greater the scale wickedness is on, the more successful it is.

In these conjunctures nothing is more striking than the little faith of those who have any faith at all. The best men seem little better than traitors. Heroes are rare; they come to be heroes slowly; and when they have reached the point, they pass into the secret world of God, and are lost to earth. What are called good men are little better than traitors, always wishing to concede, to compromise, to meet the world half way. They make free with nobody's interests but God's. They are bold with nobody's rights but His. And Him they are throwing overboard like a Jonas to the world's whale, forever and forever. It is their occupation and calling. This has been the history of the "good party," that is, of averagely good men, on earth from the beginning. Yet still, under this bold ill-treatment and this heartsickening treachery, God holds His peace. He is silent under outrage,

as Jesus was before the tribunals. His government, when most provoked, is characterized by nothing so much as an absence of visible judgments, which we finite creatures so often think would be so useful and so salutary. Our very love of Him chafes under this, and He has been obliged to write it in His Word as a divine axiom, that the wrath of man worketh not the justice of God. Whether He be abandoned or whether He be outraged, He keeps Himself equally encompassed with hiddenness and secrecy. As we have already seen, His manifestations are in fact His most secret acts. When was God so hidden in the world's history as He was when He lived upon it bodily in Palestine? Were there ever such secrets before as Bethlehem, Nazareth, Gethsemane and Calvary? Moreover, in all this history of God in His own world, there seems never to be any harmony, any peace, any mutual understanding between the Creator and His Creation. It is always strife, always war; and, which deepens the mystery, the world appears all along to have the best of it. Even when it is defeated, it does not recognize the Hand that vanquished it. Its very checks are said to be fate, accident, or laws; not the Personal will of the Three Divine Persons, One God. This is surely a fair view of God as He has vouchsafed to be contemporaneous with the nations and ages of the world.

But it is important that we should lay firm hold on this idea. Let us, then, put side by side with this historical view of God a figurative view also. The inspired writers frequently ascribe human passions and human emotions to the Almighty, in order that by this economy and condescension we may be instructed in the mind and will of Him from whom are all the issues of life and death. Our Blessed Lord also represents Himself dramatically in parables, as when He shows forth the successive failures of God's merciful intentions to sinners by the treatment which the different messengers, and finally the Son, of the Lord of the vineyard receive from the wicked tenants. We shall perhaps better grasp the mysterious truth we are considering if we venture to describe God, as we discover Him in the world, by a

series of figures. Always it is the Same whom we beheld in refulgent majesty and beauty inaccessible, worshipped by the hosts of heaven, the Ever-blessed and Undivided Trinity.

With our eyes full of light of that astonishing Vision, with our ears yet ringing with the songs of angels and the triumphant canticles of the numberless Redeemed, and, above all, with our souls hushed and shrunk into themselves with excessive awe and bashfulness, longing almost for some chastisement to make us feel our nothingness lest haply we forget it, let us turn and look into the busy fields of created action, the thronged and complicated departments of human society; and how is it that we there behold the unutterable Majesty of the Most Holy Trinity? We behold Him, first, as a Slighted Father, one who is possessed beyond speech or thought with excessive love of His children, "stretching out His arms" to them all the day long, yet they will not return: killing for them the fatted calf, and they take it as a right; using Him and all that He has for their own convenience, while their hearts never melt towards Him, and they coldly shun the embrace His burning love almost forces upon them. Would it be too bold to think of Lear's agony with his heartless daughters, as if in physical nature alone God might meet with some proportionate return; for the elements at least obey Him, and if they love Him not with reasonable love, at least He "taxes not them with unkindness," for He "never gave them kingdoms nor called them daughters"? He appears as an Unrequited Benefactor, from whom men are gracelessly taking gifts at every hour without one word of thanks or one attitude of thankfulness. They accept His bounteous and most gratuitous alms, not even as if they were receiving their rights, but as if they were being defrauded of them, as if the dole were stingy and beneath their due. They ask for more with careless gesture, in unpondered words, and with vulgar, not reverent, importunity. It is as if God were some machine, that when a spring was touched, and a wheel turned, should perform His functions, or be cast aside and broken up. He is an Unwelcome Visitor. "He comes to His own, and His

own receive Him not." Men think that while He pretends to be a sojourner, He must needs be a spy. He disturbs them at their work, and interferes with the wild license of their free will. They say to Him as the devils said, "What have we to do with Thee, Thou Son of David?" Doubtless there is a life to come, say men; but why should not God let us alone now, why come "to torment us before the time"? His visits are never welcome; they are barely tolerated. Instead of being overcome with confusion as Peter was, when he said, "Depart from me, O Lord! for I am a sinful man," and yet all the while he yearned to have his Master nearer still, men, even when He works wonders of mercy on them, beseech Him, like the dry and craven-hearted Gerasens, to depart out of their coasts.

He is a Pauper in His own creation. All things from the highest to the lowest are His. Immensity is the limit of His absolute dominion. He needs no sacrifice, for His are "the cattle upon a thousand hills." Yet He is ever condescending to ask for the commonest things, for the vilest alms, for the waste and refuse of the creatures whom He is hourly enriching. Yet not from one in a thousand does He receive what He pitifully implores. Those who give, give grudgingly, and with varying circumstances of ungraceful demeanor and a niggardly spirit. How eloquently He tells His tale, yet how few believe Him! He sits like a beggar in the cold, the scorn of disdainful eyes and the receptacle of unkindly words, all through this wintry day of free man's probation, while, above, the incense of prayer magnificently clouds His throne, and the piercing songs of the beautiful spirits in circles of delicious sound make music at His feet. He appears to us as broken-hearted, wounded in all His tenderest sensibilities, coarsely smitten in His most delicate affections, laden with unmerited humiliations; and yet reproaching no one, not shutting Himself up within Himself, not laying Himself out any the less freely to new degradations, almost anxious we should not see how pained He is, lest we also should be pained ourselves, and wholly occupied in ministering to the

pains of others, so slight, so transient, so skin-deep that they cannot bear comparison with His. He appears as a Benevolent Sage, old, venerable, kind, unselfish, and wise, who is ever putting Himself out of His way to warn, instruct, and guide us. What more attractive than His manner, what more genial and less burdensome, less wearisome? His voice is full of music, His words like the running of a cool stream under the fragrant boughs. Each one soothes a sore and heals a wound, animates the heart with joy, throws a whole new world open to the mind, and invigorates with fresh pulses of spiritual strength the lassitude of our way-worn time-tired souls. Yet while He prophecies to us happy things, we turn from Him with more disdain than Ilium from the melancholy, visionary lamentations of her ceaseless Cassandra. One while He is not listened to; another while He is rudely and indecently interrupted in His speech. Behold the two alternations in the treatment of this heavenly Sage! He appears to us again as a Complaining Friend, wronged and injured, entreating yet never reproaching, deprecating but never protesting. It is enough to break a heart, less hard than a stone to hear His lamentations in the prophets, to listen to the ineffable murmurs of His pleading. Yet no word of bitterness escapes. Nay, in His grief He finds excuse for those who have grieved Him; and if the prophet answers and takes up His strain and impeaches the sinner, the Plaintiff Himself becomes his advocate and lavishes His infinite wisdom upon his defense. When Job's comforters gloriously justified God at the expense of the uneasy sufferer, He cut them short with peremptory rebukes, silenced them, and bade Job offer sacrifice for them that the grandeur of their big words might be forgiven them. What is observable in these Seven Figures of God is that they are so touching; they put Him in such piteous case; they make religion so full of tenderness, as if the softened heart, the flowing tear, were its truest service. They look like blessed merciful artifices to win to themselves men's love. They flow out of the great ocean of God's Paternity.

But to these seven, at His own bidding, we must add an eighth, such an one as we should not have dared to add ourselves. It is His own. We have ventured, in all love and fear, trusting not to offend His ever-blessed Majesty, to put Him before ourselves in all shapes that shall provoke affection and awaken piety. But He condescends to liken Himself to something evil. Even if we love Him not, still for our own necessities' sake He would fain have us pray to Him, and go on praying, that we may soften our hearts at last by the very accumulation of His mercies. Let us be drawn to Him anyhow, so long only as we be drawn to Him. Let there be beginnings of piety, no matter how self-seeking at first they be. Anything shall be welcomed, for the sake of the hope of what will follow, and in great faith of the almost omnipotence of grace. And to show us all this, and more than this, a great deal which we have in our hearts but which lies too deep for words, in the Gospel of St. Luke God stops to compare Himself to the Unjust Judge who "feared not God nor regarded man," and whose selfish love of ease was vanquished only by the pertinacity of the importunate widow. "Now because this widow is troublesome to Me, I will avenge her, lest continually coming she weary Me." Such are the words which God not only permits, but even suggests to us as a picture of Himself. We dare not comment upon them lest we should seem to make free. When God Himself suggests familiarity, then is it time for us to be more stricken with awe than ever we were before.

Now put together these pictures of The Slighted Father, The Unrequited Benefactor, The Unwelcome Visitor, The Pauper in His Own Creation, The Broken-Hearted Outcast, The Sage Ridiculed, The Complaining Mind, and the Unjust Judge. Do they not form themselves into a positive revelation of God, of God in the world? Try in the minuteness of careful and loving meditation whether they do not equally compose the eighteen hundred years' biography of the Blessed Sacrament in the churches of men. Draw them out and dwell upon them one by one, and

you will see how much they will bring out that is beautiful, tender, touching, holy, and divine. They are enough of themselves to form a complete theology of the heart. But in truth if we scrutinize God to the utmost in His own world, if we put the Creator into every conceivable relation to His creatures which reverent analogy will allow, if we take the measure and transcribe the outlines of every one of His operations which He permits us to detect, we shall still find that we have all the while been discovering and multiplying similitudes and illustrations of the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament lies at the bottom of Creation, impregnating it all with its own divine idea, and it appears again at the top clasping all mysteries together in one radiant point of union, the last legacy of Jesus, the masterpiece of Redeeming Love, the pearl surmounting the Diadem of all Creation.

There is a vision given in the meditations of Sister Emmerich, which is, to say the least of it, most artistically beautiful. Jesus, to be the least troublesome, has been sunk by His guards into a kind of well; and is sitting at the bottom with His hands tied behind Him. The sun of Good Friday rises above the hills, and mounts into the sky, and at length has attained sufficient altitude to pierce the well with one slanting ray. It lights on Jesus. That solitary beam of brightness illuminates Him in the depth of His dungeon, and He raises His drooping eyes to meet it. The creature is illuminating its Creator. His face is pale as death, disfigured with blood and earth and spittle, His hair drenched, matted, and disordered, His hands manacled and pinioned, His vesture disfigured and disarrayed: and there He is in the first light of that sun at whose setting the great mystery of woe will be complete and over. Secret, little, helpless, ignominious, and in the power of His own creatures, that figure of Jesus Abandoned seems to image forth the invisible God Himself, hiding in a hole of His own creation. So He seems to me to have been in every nation and in every age, and in every department and province of the world. That is His way. That mystery is His portrait, with

a strong light upon it. Jesus is a picture of God. The Incarnation is after the same fashion as creation was. God is consistent with Himself in all His mysteries. So also that mystery is a picture of the Blessed Sacrament; for the Blessed Sacrament too, as is always the case with Jesus, is a portrait of God. What then can be more unthoughtful, or indicate a mind less used to the ways of God, than to fancy that the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation is a gratuitous addition to religion, an unnecessary fiction, a prodigious invention, a monstrous imagination, out of keeping with the rest of God's ways, a thing by itself, and out of harmony with the style of His other works? It is part of an immense system, the conclusion of many divine premises. It is the keystone of creation's arch, and also the apex of that pyramid of creation which runs up and loses itself in the Divine Person of the Eternal Word, and so hangs all things on to God.

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

Frequent Confession

Confession is a stupendous work, in which God and man combine to do great things. It is a mixed act, partly by God and partly by man. It belongs therefore to the supernatural order. It is an action of immense significance, of superhuman power, and, it may be, of incalculable worth. The very fact of its combining in itself the agencies of the Creator and His creature is enough to show us of what value and consequence it is. If a few common actions done perfectly are enough to make saints of us, what may we not say of a few perfect confessions? Yet we go to confession weekly and are what we are! Literature is a power on earth, and a power in the natural order, whose importance it is not easy to exaggerate. Different nations have had their literatures. Each nation has had various schools of literature at different times. They have stood to the progress of civilization in the double relation of cause and effect. They have stamped epochs. They have been dominant, or nearly dominant over manners and morals

of their times. They have therefore indirectly decided the eternal destiny of multitudes of individual souls. Yet, no one school of literature, nor all its schools put together can compete with a single good confession in beauty or importance. Philosophies have risen and fallen on the earth, and have reigned successively and have reigned energetically; and each system thought itself the perfection of the world and the solution of the grand difficulty. Yet the homeliness of one good confession is better than the subtleties of the most profound intellectual system. No revolution, though it may uncrown a king and emancipate a people, is of so much consequence as a good confession. No one must underrate the importance of scientific discoveries. Not only may the wider distribution of comfort and the elevation of the temporal well-being of the world depend upon them, but happiness and morals are often implicitly concerned in them. Yet no discovery that was ever made can compete in real intrinsic importance with a good confession.

Confession is an act of faith on the part of the creature. It is also an act of the most concentrated worship. It is a breaking with the world and a turning to God. It is a triumph over millions of evil spirits of huge power and, comparatively with us men, of unbounded intellect. It is the beginning of an eternity of ineffable union with God and confers the right of beholding the Invisible face to face. A man sees in a fellow-creature as sinful as himself, perhaps even evidently more unworthy, the form and features and real jurisdiction of the Incarnate Son of God. He kneels at his feet as if he were divine. He narrates to him the most secret shames and hidden sins of his soul. He submits to his questioning as if he were the absolute and ultimate Judge of all the earth. He listens with meekness to his reproof, as if it were God Himself who spoke. He leaves to him the fixing of his punishment. He gives him rights over much of the arrangements of his external life. He makes this narration of his sins with a profound sorrow, a sorrow which is based on no mere human disgrace, or forfeiture of worldly honor, or ruin of temporal inter-

ests. It is not even based only on the fear of divine punishments without some admixture of divine love. He is sorry with a sorrow to which neither all the power nor all the wisdom of the world can help him, but which is itself the supernatural gift of God. His sorrow involves a detestation of his past sin, which is another gift of God. It is accompanied also with a firm determination never to offend God again, a determination which chooses between the will of God and the liberty of sin, and elects God's will, whatever cost it may be found to involve. This energetic determination is the thing which he has taken most pains about. Neither has he come to it without study, effort and diligence. Nevertheless, it is God's gift rather than his own attainment. His act thus completed, with much help and interference on the part of God, God Himself begins his exclusive part. One of his creatures, a fallible, as well as himself a guilty judge, pronounces some few words and straightway, though invisibly and spiritually, there falls from the veins of Jesus a shower of the Precious Blood, shed hundreds of years ago and resumed three days after it was shed, and bedews the sinner's soul. All his guilt is washed away instantaneously. His state is completely changed. Manifold works are done in his soul, such as the reinfusion of certain supernatural habits, the revival of dead merits, and a communication of the divine nature. His change can only be paralleled with that of a devil into an angel. All heaven is stirred at the event. It is the special subject of an angelic jubilee. No angel or saint could have done it, or even have applied its instruments. It is the immediate action of the Creator on the soul of His creature. This is a modest description of a good confession, kept very much within bounds, and which might have been heightened by many other seemingly miraculous phenomena. In its measure and degree, without the reinfusion of habits, and sundry other changes, the same supernatural apparatus attends upon the confession of venial sin. God is not less active nor grace less mysterious in the act. Yet this is the act which we, with God, perform weekly and are what we are!

Now, from such an action as this, what results might we not expect? We can only compare it to baptism or to martyrdom, one of which permanently changes our state and impresses an abiding character upon our souls, and the other admits us to the immediate vision of God. We should at least expect great things to follow from a valid confession; we should look for marked changes and enduring results. The action involves so very much on our part and holds in itself such a vast amount of divine agency that, if it be valid at all, it must go forth on its way conquering and working miracles. . . . If a valid confession can send a life-long sinner and a public criminal from the scaffold to the bright inner heaven, surely also the making of a saint is within the compass of its capabilities. But now, multiply these valid confessions of us who are aiming at a devout life and are taking very considerable pains about it. Multiply our years by fifty. Perhaps we have made between one and two thousand valid confessions. For each confession we have reverently prepared; for each we have examined our consciences and excited our sorrow; for each we have taken peculiar pains and made hearty prayer for our firm purpose of amendment; each has been gloriously crowned by absolution. Now, would it not be monstrous to say that these thousand or two thousand confessions have made no visible change in us, had left us substantially what we were before, and had done nothing more than possibly prevent us from becoming something worse? Would it not shake a man's faith to be told such a thing? Neither can we fall back upon the supposition of the invalidity of these confessions. For I am speaking only of careful confessions of people who are very much in earnest, who are not taking things easily, who do not indulge in liberties with God, and who are making a great point and a distinct point of sorrow for venial sins, while they are solicitous about their purpose of amendment. If such confessions are not valid, then none in the world are.

What, as a matter of fact, are the actual results of a thousand good confessions? We have a tolerably clear remembrance of

what we were twenty years ago. Now, as to the general improvement of our character, what have all these confessions done? Is there much palpable change? Is the change solid? Is its amount at all proportioned to the amount of supernatural agency, to the quantity of the Precious Blood, to the immediate operation of the Eternal Creator upon our souls? Again: what has been the result of all these confessions in the way of power over venial sins and culpable unworthinesses which we have been perpetually confessing? Are we more masters of ourselves than we were? Is our growth in self-mastery at all adequate to the expenditure both of God and ourselves in a thousand confessions? Let us take our tongues. It is plain that a man who makes his meditation in the morning and does not govern his tongue during the day is a religious sham. Surely a man who confesses week after week a want of government of the tongue and who governs it not a whit better in succeeding weeks ought not, by common laws, be far from a hypocrite. Yet we should be afraid of laying down any such axiom, lest we should be only sanctioning a law not merely against ourselves, but by which, if men were to be judged, they might as well cease to hope. Again: what have our thousands of confessions done for us in the way of increase of fervor? Is the retrospect from this point of view more satisfactory? . . . There has been disappointment in the matter, invariable if not excessive. This is disheartening, but the road to all amendment lies through some disheartenment.

There is no kindness in landing us in a difficulty unless we are also shown how to get out of it. What is the cause of the results of frequent confessions falling so far below our most reasonable calculations? We are sincere, we are diligent. We have faith. What then is lacking? What is the secret want? Purity of intention! A short answer, but a very broad one. This is the whole account of the matter, the reading of the riddle, the light in the dark place. We have not looked simply, and only, and always at God. . . .

It may be that our time has come for going to confession, and

therefore that we go, not driven by any interior necessity, by any desire to be more closely united to God, or to be more thoroughly washed from our iniquities. It is the day for confession and therefore we go. We take the usual pains with our examination, our sorrow, our purpose. Still, it remains true that we go because it is the time to go. Let me make an observation here. It is hard to do well the things that we are doing constantly. Certainly. But experience shows us that these things do not tend with equal propension at all times to become mere formalities. Like other temptations, the temptation to be formal has its seasons, its departures, its returns. So there are times—for which we can see no reason only that it is so—when the sacraments incline to become formalities. Now at these seasons we must not be content with our usual pains; we must take unusual pains because unusual pains are necessary then to get us up to the common point to which at ordinary times the usual pains can take us. Thus, a meditation of ten minutes before the Blessed Sacrament, on the sanctity of God, or on the necessities of our souls, if added to the usual diligence and preparation would put the vigor we need into our confession of routine.

Some of us get into a way of never looking at confession by itself. To us it is simply a part of the preparation for Communion. Of course we know that confession is a sacrament by itself; but we do not know it with an energetic practical knowledge. It is to us practically part of another ceremony. Few people do justice to the mischievous tendency of this mistake. It is fertile in evils to the soul. It interferes with our perception of the necessity of grace. It takes off the edge from our hatred of sin. It operates unfavorably on our humility by leading us to dwell too much on our privileges and too little on our responsibilities. It even lessens our appreciation of God's goodness by leading us to dwell on it apart from the sense of our own wretchedness. There is a propriety in confession going before Communion. But confession is an awful sacrament in itself, with separate proprieties of its own, deeply to be revered, and almost dreaded, because of the tingling realities of its contact with God.

Sometimes—and this a common fault in converts—people go to confession only for the purpose of direction. They use a great sacrament merely as an occasion for something else, for another purpose, a good purpose indeed, but a very inferior and subordinate one. Thus, they put aside the thought of the absolution, or rather, it does not come to them to think of it. They have probably not taken much pains with their examination, their sorrow, and their purpose of amendment as they should have done. They have not realized God's peculiar presence in the confessional because they have not come to confession as a sacrament. Hence confession often disappoints them, and they lose their devotion to it as a sacrament. Their irreverence has been unconscious and unintentional; but it is an irreverence and they suffer for it in their souls. They have come to talk or to listen. They have not come to confess. Thus, they confess, not invalidly, but unworthily, not discerning the Precious Blood and its special sacramental dispensation there. Experience shows that there are few things more difficult to implant in converts than a real faith in confession as a sacrament and a grave humble advertence to the sacramental character of the action in which they are engaged. We must be at great pains in teaching them this, more especially if they have been in the habit of going to confession while they were outside the Church, as it is precisely these persons who take the greatest liberty with the sacrament. This often interferes very seriously with their becoming fervent Catholics. Plainly, it is the old leaven still at work: self is the center, and not God. Direction is more attractive to them than confession.

Sometimes we go to confession because, having sinned, we fear the punishment of our sins. It is a most excellent reason for going to confession; nay, more than excellent, it is imperative. We want to shorten purgatory. We want to be in a condition for gaining indulgences. Two most excellent wants—so excellent that a man has reason to suspect his whole piety to be a delusion if he has them not. It is very hard, also, while under the pressure of a sense of sin, not to let this motive be not merely present, but dominant. Nevertheless, we had better take some little pains to

hinder its being so. Without losing hold of that motive, we can push a little deeper by prayer and effort, because prayer and effort will both bring the grace to do so. We can put ourselves in God's presence and look at His side of the question. We can wish to have our souls cleansed for the sake of God's glory as well as our own safety. At any rate, the avoiding of hell and the shortening of purgatory must not have all the action to themselves. Some room must be left for higher things. There must be some loving devotion to the sanctity of God, in order to do well what we do validly.

These are specimens of the intentions with which we often go to confession. Self-love, varying as it does in almost every soul, can vary them almost indefinitely. Each of us best knows his own dishonesties. The conclusion seems to be that we do not habitually go to confession looking simply and steadfastly, and exclusively to God. The consequence is that very little, comparatively speaking, comes of our frequent confession—so little that we can bear its littleness no longer, and are determined that there shall be a change. The advice, then, is to do fewer things and to do them better, taking more pains with our purity of intention. Do we not often ask ourselves why so few souls are perfect? The answer is that they are kept back by many things, but by few things so much as by the too great number of their prayers and spiritual exercises. They do too much to do it well. Their life treads on its own heels all day long. They are so pressed by all they have taken upon themselves that they get into a hurry, and so raise the dust as they go; and this dust hinders them from seeing God.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

The Omnipresent Life of God

It is one of the thoughts beneath whose broad shadow all the nations of the earth may gather and sit musing, that, while the sun is shining, or the moon silvering the woods, or the noontide

being lulled to sleep by its own fragrances, or the river lapsing down to the sea through tuneful groves and over cattle-spotted plains, this wonderful divine life is going on everywhere, close to us and far off, in our own country, and in other lands, far above the empyrean heaven and down in our own souls. It is a thought to make us very grave, that this life of God holds us like a hand, penetrates us like a sword, and knows nothing of the space which gives room or of the time which is flowing above our heads. As it has been from all eternity, so it is now. It has found no new place. Creation has not in any way displaced it. It has undergone no modification. It has acquired nothing, experienced nothing. Its ungrowing magnificence is ever fresh as the dawn, ever new as the first creation. It is always the same, yet never monotonous. Illimitably outspread beyond all imaginary space, it is full, complete, intense, in every point of space, at every point of time. A paradise of intellectual delights, a boundless fire of uncreated loves, an ocean of glad, wise resistless being, it is glorious in its liberty, and glorious in the grandeur of its necessities. It is a silence of amazing colloquies, a sanctuary of restful joys, a life of omnipotent and omnipresent simplicity, a unity of Three distinct adorable Persons. Surely all creation is not as a feather in comparison of this. How little by the side of this awful majestic life are all the schemes of men, how paltry their interests! How tame and tiresome seem the political revolutions of earth, the greatest discoveries of science, the most golden epochs of literature, when we think of the omnipresent life of God! All human joys appear but like the bursting of the foam bells on the crest of the wave and all human sorrows but as the sighing of the night-wind in the distant wood; and yet this vast life of God compasses both the sorrows and the joys with tranquillest, watchfullest, minutest love. But to us they should seem even smaller than they seem to God, because the thought of the Infinite dwarfs all things in our sight, and ourselves also in our own estimation.

What a wonderful permission to us is the permission to love God! What then shall we say, when we consider that we our-

selves are to be admitted to the sight and enjoyment of this life of God? It is the very end for which we were created. Nay, more; we ourselves have been in some sense, part of that divine life. We have been known and loved, up in those regions of eternity, in those boundless tracts of uncreated being, before the birth of time; and it is our very destination to enter into the joy of that exulting life, to see God as He is, and to live in endless companionship with Him. It is our incredible bliss to be allowed to add one spark more to the glory, the outward glory of that blessed majesty. We can be one flash of lightning more round the immensity of His throne, one additional coruscation in the intolerable radiance of the merciful crown which He vouchsafes to wear. Infinitely little as we are, we are—and it is our joy to be so—a fresh exercise to Him of His irresponsible sovereignty. We are large enough to catch the light of His justice and be another place for it to shine upon. His mercy can beautifully reflect itself even in the shallows of our tiny souls. We can lie upon the shore of that exulting life, and shine and glow and murmur while the bright waters wash over us forever. Oh, beautiful destiny of men! How happy is our present; our future how much happier! How happy is our worship! How happy even the very fear with which we work out a salvation so magnificent and so divine!

—*Bethlehem*

A Region Which Most Men Cross

The world of wounded feelings is like one of those fabulous worlds of old geography. It follows no rules. The needle ceases to point to the North. It lies apart from all analogies. It is a region of unreasonable things. It is full of contradictions and confusions. Everything which happens in it is unexpected from the very fertility if its lawlessness. It is peopled by individual souls and each soul is a species by itself. Is there much practical good, then, in penetrating into the center of an anomolous world?

Is there any chance of its vagaries being reduced into a science? Perhaps not. Yet observation will teach us a great deal, and we have hardly a right to say that there is nothing to be said of a region which most men cross on their way to heaven, and which is precisely the region which those who are most capable of perfection cross at its broadest place, and so are longest in crossing.

I suppose there are few men in life who have not at times, or once at least, sat down and wondered whether life were worth the living. If we will not let faith speak, there is a great deal to be said on both sides. Faith tyrannizes over the question so completely that it ceases to be a question in her presence. Upon the whole, however, men seem to like life. I infer this not only from their reluctance to part with it, but from their evident zest in living. The most unhappy man I have ever seen—I see him now in my mind's eye—obviously relished his life exceedingly. The least tolerable thing in life is perhaps its monotony. Somehow, the life that is fullest of attractions comes to drag at last. Almost all lives have got a lame limb. Nevertheless, if we strike a balance between living and not living, it is in favor of living, with such a surplus that it is not worth while going back to look for errors in our summing. No conceivable errors would put the total the other way. But here is a remarkable thing, that gifted lives are those about which we may most reasonably doubt whether they are worth living. Gifts bring with them an inheritance of pains—as if they were out of place in a world like this. The extreme delicacy of any one sense brings with it more additional annoyances than extra pleasures. Fineness of perception, delicacy of taste, keenness of appreciation, liveliness of imagination, excessive sensitiveness of feeling—all these things bring exquisite pleasures with them; but, in a world whose constitution has been deranged by sin, they expose us to continual shocks and jars, which often more than counterbalance the enjoyment. This is only what we should expect. Obtuse people feel less than others. They feel sin less, and the disproportionateness of things, and the host of minor evils which haunt life from

its beginning to its end. Nevertheless, all these gifts are great helps to perfection. Some spiritual writers have spoken of them as if they were indispensable. Certainly of some of them it is true that, where saints have not had them naturally, grace has infused them. It is of one of these things that I am going to speak to you now, a great help or a great hindrance in the spiritual life, a source of peculiar pleasure and a cause of peculiar pain in the natural life—easily-wounded feelings, the gift or the curse of sensitiveness.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Sensitiveness in the Spiritual Life

Sensitiveness is neither a virtue nor a vice but it is not on that account less intimately connected with the spiritual life. As years go by, their varying circumstances gradually disclose to us depths and peculiarities of our own character, which are deeply concerned with holiness, yet are not in themselves either virtues or vices. They are capabilities of both and can with equal facility lend themselves to either. They are points in our character at which we begin to go wrong, or at which grace exhibits a predilection to graft itself. Thus they are strengths as well as weaknesses. Sensitiveness is one of the most important of these things. I do not see how sublime virtue can be reached without it, while on the other hand, we behold every day into what depths of incalculable meanness it can plunge great minds, affectionate hearts, and strong characters. It is the secret cause of one-half of the disedifying inconsistencies of religious people. It rules us more powerfully than any of our passions. It absorbs our character into itself, until it alone almost becomes our character. It makes everything in life exquisite and exaggerated. It belongs especially to affectionate dispositions; yet it is not the same thing as tenderness. Tenderness comes much nearer to being a virtue. But sensitiveness without tenderness is a very terrible thing.

When separated from it, sensitiveness is for the most part allied with cruelty, and cruelty is a complete disability to be a saint. Cruel men are more common than we might have supposed; for modern society exhibits great facilities and conveniences for cruelty. Many men are tyrants in the secret domestic relations of life, who are not only bland and yielding in society, but even charm us by a manifestation of humility, which is not simulated, neither is it altogether unreal. Cruelty and humility often combine very strangely. Nay, what too often is domestic life, because of cruelty, but a veil behind which lie interminable regions of unhappiness, trodden wildly or trodden wearily by unsuspected thousands every day?

Sensitive men are also very quick and keen in their sympathies; but these sympathies are very narrow. Generally speaking, such men can only sympathize with sorrows which they themselves have passed through. Their hearts cannot outgrow the circle of their own experience. They are often not large-hearted men, neither are they forgiving men. There is indeed much narrowness both of mind and heart about sensitiveness when it is not found in combination with other things. It is always degenerating into umbrageousness and so darkening the heart unless that heart is peculiarly blithe and sunny in itself. A man who is sensitive without being elastic is a false character, and will always be found on trial far worse than he seems. Last of all, a sensitive man is generally disinclined to an interior life. Whether it is that all probing is so painful to him that he shrinks from it, or that he has a wider experience than other men of his power of self-delusion, or that he finds outward kindness a charity so difficult to him that he overvalues it, so it is, that we find very sensitive men highly impatient of an interior life, and almost inclined to treat it with contempt. It irritates them so strangely that we may be sure there is something in it which is deeply uncongenial to them. At the same time, sensitiveness confers almost a microscopic power upon conscience, and so enables

us to perceive the finer shades of evil and to correspond to the more delicate operations of grace.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Our Inclination to Wounded Feelings

Sensitiveness is a common gift in its ordinary degrees, but very uncommon in its highest degrees. But in almost all hearts the amount of liability to wounded feelings is hardly credible beforehand. It is sufficient completely to obscure our judgment, to deceive our affections, and to make us forget proprieties in our outward demeanor. Men are constantly placing themselves in false and foolish positions under its influence. They can only avoid this, either supernaturally through great grace, or naturally through a keen sense of the ridiculous, which is one of the greatest safeguards through life. Sensitiveness is therefore, on the whole, a common phenomenon in the spiritual life, so common as to justify our making it a subject of investigation. . . .

We speak of wounded feelings as if they were far more wrong than they are. We confound them with the consequences which follow from them when they are not under the dominion of grace. Our own attainments are perhaps too low to enable us to estimate the magnificent fruits of wounded feelings when they are consecrated by grace. Our tone about wounded feelings is given to be exaggerated condemnation. This leads to many evils but to two especially,—scrupulousness and discouragement. Theology tells us that our Blessed Lord's Body was especially formed for suffering. In like manner we should suppose that His Sacred Heart was sensitive above all other hearts. It is this which carries the sufferings of His Passion deeper down than we can follow them. Our sensitiveness, as well as our other characteristics, must be exalted into a conformity with His. Let us look at it, therefore, with fairness and moderation. If wounded feelings are a fountain of venial sins, they are also a capability of great holiness. They do not want killing, they want supernaturalizing. Perhaps it

is not possible for us to make ourselves obtuse; but it is an enormous mischief even to try to do so. If we succeed, then we have stereotyped our present lowness in grace, and have gained nothing but a worthless diminution of some of the noblest pains of life. Thus, the mortification of sensitiveness is a peculiar process. It is not a blunting, or stunning, or putting to death of sensitiveness, as it is with vices. But it is a brave making use of the torture of our wounded feelings to get nearer to God and to be kinder to men. What we have to avoid is the common error of blaming the feelings, instead of blaming consequences which would never come of them if we corresponded to our grace. We must bear in mind at all times this peculiarity of mortifying our wounded feelings, as distinguished from other mortifications. This is not a mere subtlety, or a piece of metaphysical straw-splitting. I grant that there is a legitimate prejudice against refined distinctions; but we cannot do without them in the spiritual life. Coarseness and roughness spoil everything there. Simplicity is the highest grace and the last reached; and what is simplicity but an almost incredible supernatural refinement?

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Sensitiveness Builds More Than It Will Bear

Sensitiveness affects us in various ways. It makes us fanciful. We imagine offense has been intended where it has never been dreamed of. It constructs entire imaginary histories upon what is often no foundation at all. Even where there is a basis of truth, it builds upon it more than it will bear. It magnifies and exaggerates things. It puts the wildest constructions upon innocent actions. It mistakes indifference for intensity. It imagines subtlety where there has only been carelessness. It throws a monstrous significance into a chance phrase, and then broods on it for years, literally for years. From being fanciful we pass to being suspicious. Where we do not see phantoms we are sure they are lying in ambush. We start at shadows. We make all life like rid-

ing a mettlesome horse by moonlight, when there are shadows at every turn; and there are few things more irksome or more irritating. Our mind is crowded with suspicions. We forget God. We are distracted in prayer. We are hardly able to distinguish between what is shadow and what is substance. We give shadows the power to harm us as if they were substances. It is difficult to say whether we grow more intolerable to ourselves, or to those around us. From being suspicious we pass to being umbrageous. We grow moody and bitter. We add sulkiness to our suspicions. There is no dealing with us. If an offender begs our pardon, we do not forgive him. We discover some new offense in the very act. He had no right to beg our pardon. He put himself into a position of superiority by doing so. We are angry with him for it. It is just like him to do it. It is a piece of conceit and forwardness. He should have waited until we made the advances. We will not believe he is sincere. On whichever side men take us they will find us equally unmanageable. They will meet with nothing but rebuffs. Now what grace, what conceivable Christ-like thing can grow in such an atmosphere as this?

But shadows distort the bulk of things. So, when we are umbrageous, all our feelings connected with the subject-matter which annoys us are disproportionate. This leads us into all manner of mistakes. We attach the wrong things to the wrong person. We do not know where to take our aim, the outline of the shadows is so swollen and uncertain. We make people think we are worse than we really are. When we come forward of our own accord, we do so in an ungraceful way. When, on the contrary, men come upon us, our manner is startled and menacing. Hence comes excitement, excitement which by morosely brooding over itself becomes a sort of subordinate madness. Then it is that we become almost incurable. For then it is that we become as sure that we are in the right as if it had been revealed to us. The proofs of the unkindness of others are overwhelming. We put our evidence together and get up our case against our best friend, it may be, or at least against an unhappily offending friend, as a

barrister gets up a case against a murderer. The excitement burns our judgment into us, as the fire anneals the porcelain and fixes the patterns and colors. We shall never change our minds now. Then come the sins, outstreaming like a mountain-torrent—thoughts, words, actions, manifold displays of outward irritability. Every one of these is most likely irrevocable. We have dropped a mere word of bitterness, and it clings like a stain to the poor offender for life. It maims his power for doing good. It throws a shadow over his sunshine. We stand between God and him. Yet perhaps the offense was imaginary, or perhaps it was nothing like so great; and, after all, what was it when weighed against past kindness? We have now got very far. We have come in sight of hatred. It is possible now for us to hate. Possible; yet is not the mere possibility terrific? Oh, who can set bounds to the unmercifulness of a sensitive man?

This is the bad side of things. Here is plenty of occupation for a holy self-revenge. There is abundance to mortify in all this. We must be very unsparing of ourselves. A touch will not cure the matter. We must hold the caustic firmly, and press it hard, and keep it long on the place, even while we tremble and are on the brink of fainting. We must remember we have come in sight of hatred in our own souls, and no panic is out of proportion to such a terror. We may plead our health as being in a great measure to blame for these ugly developments of our sensitiveness. Very likely this is true. It often seems as if men had only a given quantity of grace, a given quantity of patience, for example; and the endurance of pain draws upon the bank till it breaks and we have no patience left to pay others with in the little rubs and affronts of daily life. Indigestion will make even a bright-minded, limpid-hearted man umbrageous. But the truth of all this is no defense, and only a poor extenuation. But, at any rate, it is no exemption from the obligation of mortifying these wounded feelings. We must be swift also as well as unsparing. We must work day and night as men do on a railway when a bridge has broken down. All traffic between heaven and ourselves is interrupted

till we have got the ruin out of the way. Those grim laborers by torchlight in the thick darkness of night, they are our models in this desperate task of mortifying our wounded feelings.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Sensitiveness Can Be a Grand Gift

I do not think that sensitiveness is an evidence of our fallen state, but only that certain developments of it are so. On the contrary, I believe that in itself it is a grand gift, and that he is most fortunate who is most sensitive. Yet it runs into what is wrong so swiftly that it always seems wrong, and therefore causes us much more unhappiness than it need do. The quickness to feel an unkindness, the tenderness that makes us shrink before we are touched, the subtlety that causes us to fancy unkind intentions when there were none, the delicacy which is almost crushed by little roughnesses—these are evidently without a shadow of sin. They are not moral actions. They are both involuntary and indeliberate. They are our character and constitution. Grace may change and elevate them, may fortify them with a gift of the Holy Ghost, and counterbalance them by making us love God more fervently and care for His interests more exclusively. But, meanwhile, they are not wrong in themselves. Moreover, the first moments of our sensitiveness, the first ideas, the first imaginations, the first impulses, are wholly free from sin; and many persons would be much happier if they could always bear this in mind. We are cast down if we feel a thing with exceeding keenness, which is in reality a feeling we cannot help, a feeling which, if it is to be overcome, can only be overcome gradually and in the long run as a result of continuous processes of grace. Our self-annoyance ought not to begin till we proceed to act upon our sensitiveness, whether inwardly by deliberate thoughts and that brooding which is a proximate occasion of sins against charity, or outwardly, by word, manner, or action. Neither is the undiminished keenness of feeling to be regarded as any

proof of immortification; yet how often are people overwhelmed with sadness because they have mistaken it for one!

In order to understand in what the mortification of our sensitiveness consists, let us take a case. Some shadow has come between us and one whom we love, and whom we continue to love in spite of the shadow. The shadow broadens, lengthens, thickens, we hardly know how. Words of his are reported to us. They have a dubious, if not an unkind sound about them. We are stung, and the pain is so great that we wince under it. We know very well that words taken out of their context are very different from what they are in it. Experience has taught us that reported words are hardly ever exact; and, even when exact, they put on a new character by being separated from manner, tone, look, and circumstances. The unkindness of reported words is more often from the mind of the reporter than from the mind of the original speaker. A man given to report things is never a kind man. He is no better than a bird of prey, given to feed on the garbage of the baser parts of our poor nature. We know all this. Nevertheless, we are stung with the words. They rankle. There was poison on the arrows. Then come some actions or looks of our friend which admit of an unkindly interpretation. Our first impulse is to interpret them by our own pain at the former words. Like the roots of trees, it is the nature of a misunderstanding to entangle itself as it grows. It is its instinct to outgrow the possibility of ever being explained. It is easier to cut out a cancer than to disengage from the heart a misunderstanding which has once had time to harden there. The shadow, then, still continues. We do not speak. But our friend is, unconsciously perhaps, causing us the most exquisite torture by nearly everything he says or does, or is reported to have said or done, with regard to us. Now, let us suppose that, while we have been wincing, we have been forcing ourselves intellectually to believe that no unkindness was intended, that we have checked ourselves sharply whenever we have caught ourselves brooding on the matter, that we have punished in ourselves any imaginary speeches, indictments, or

defenses which our imagination has indulged in, that we have accused ourselves sedulously in confession of everything which had the slightest aspect of uncharitableness, that we have not allowed ourselves to express our sensitiveness in complaints or in actions, that we have prayed more than ever for him who is the cause of our suffering, and that, when we could do so without giving him pain or discomfort, we have humbled ourselves by telling him of those inward feelings which must seem to him exaggerated and absurd, even if not petty, base, and mean—let us suppose all this, and then, though our sensitiveness is as lively as ever and our pain as sharp, we have been by God's grace mortifying it to good purpose. It is truly miserable work. For the very struggle defiles us. Our inward life is all thrown into disarray, and kept so perhaps for months or years. There are many cases in which we cannot speak, cases in which speaking would make matters worse. There are many misunderstandings which we shall only lay down where so many other burdens are laid down, just on this side of the judgement-seat. Hearts are often sundered in his life, whose love of each other is growing secretly beneath the shadow of a misunderstanding; and the unexpected growth will be one of the sweet surprises of eternity. Meanwhile, if we have done what has been described above, we are not only without sin, but we have earned merits and have gone heavenward by strides rather than by steps. We have acted nobly, as our infirmity and littleness may lawfully count nobility. Yet years of this inward strain may not, perhaps, allay our sensitiveness one iota. When we lie down to die, we may have the same feeling of being flayed alive which we have now. It is not always so, but it is often so. Some men grace makes blessedly insensible; other men it makes more tender and susceptible. I would rather have this last gift than that other blessing.

In the process of mortifying our sensitiveness we must also bear in mind that the sensitiveness of each one of us is peculiar. We share it with no one else. It is individual. It is part of our idiosyncrasy. We may resemble this man rather than another. But

a resemblance is all. No man's sensitiveness is quite the same as another man's. It depends on combinations of character, which nature does not appear ever to repeat exactly. We must therefore learn our own. This is of importance in two ways. Things may be wrong in others which are not wrong in us; and the knowledge of this will sometimes save us from discouragement. Again: things may be excusable in others which are inexcusable in us; and the knowledge of this will hinder our defending and dispensing ourselves where we have no right to do so. We must also remember that the tendency of sensitiveness is always toward selfishness. An unusually affectionate man is generally a man of unusual self-love; and sensitiveness is a department of the affections. It comes from what is good. Indeed, it comes from what is too good for the present state of things. Hence it often does a mischief here, while it is in itself a prophecy, or rather, an actual germ of some undeveloped excellence of our eternity.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

The Grand Privileges of Sensitiveness

I have defended sensitiveness and yet I have said many strong things against it. So I must not conclude without saying something about its privileges. Even in natural things, it is the source of our keenest and most refined enjoyment. It is sensitiveness alone which finds out what lies under the monotony of life, and so gives us spirits to bear it. It glorifies all our joys and makes sorrows more tolerable by its carrying them down deeper into our hearts. While it widens the sphere of our love, it also intensifies its action. It gives a zest to the practice of virtue, which is in natural things what divine sweetness is in spiritual things. But its grand privilege is that it makes us especially capable of the higher graces of sanctity. There is a delicacy or subtlety in the more uncommon operations of grace which appears to require something congenial in the natural character on which it may graft itself. Thus, sensitiveness is the best basis for a great grace

of charity, because it is an almost infinite power of sympathy. It reveals to us the finer and more interior perfections of charity. It is also infallible in its instincts for heavenly things and quickly apprehends God, and is thus an excellent foundation for interior peace. It will thus perhaps increase our joy in heaven if natural character is allowed any action there, independent of the degree of supernatural love.

Sensitiveness also peculiarly enables us to understand God, to penetrate the meaning of His ways with us, to feel each touch of His grace, to discover the faintest working of a divine vocation, and to be uneasy under any scarcely perceptible drifting away from His Will. We are enabled by it to correspond to the jealousy of God—that jealousy which is characteristic of His sanctity and enters so deeply into all His dealings with souls that are aiming at perfection. Sensitiveness also makes us unworldly by continually bringing home to us our unfitness for the world. It is a gift whose dower is suffering and which therefore makes us pine in our exile, even while it is contributing joys which are the best natural consolations of that exile. It is a source of sanctification uniting in itself all the four excellences, according to which we judge of the importance and efficacy of means of grace. It is constant; it is acute; it is unsuspected; it is fatal to self-love. By unsuspected, I mean two things: first, that it goes on sanctifying us even while we are not adverting to the fact; and secondly, that so little delusion adheres to its method of operation that we may trust ourselves to it without suspicion. Last of all, it is a peculiarly Christ-like fountain of suffering. Think of the mystery of the Agony in the Garden. It was a great part of that mystery that therein our dearest Lord put Himself in the place of every one of us. He bore our sins; He identified Himself with our shames; He felt our shrinkings. Our finest sensitiveness is coarse and blunt compared with His. We rudely pressed every one of the quivering keys of His Heart, and made it utter the low and plaintive notes of a sorrow beyond our understanding. He shrank like a sensitive plant from the shame with which we

covered Him. In other mysteries of the Passion we have outward pains, external shame, publicity, unkindness and the desertion of friends; but the suffering of the Agony was in no slight degree, and above the other mysteries, the keenness of wounded feelings. To us, therefore, the model and the consolation in our excess of wounded feeling is that most dear and divine Heart whose inward wound finds words in the Reproaches of Good Friday.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

A Taste for Reading and the Spiritual Life

A man has tried for some time to avoid sin and to keep close to God. He has taken pleasure in prayer, in religious services, and, above all in the Blessed Sacrament. Peace is consciously stealing over a life which was perhaps fretful and agitated before. Now self-knowledge comes in upon him largely, yet not so as to confuse or overwhelm him. He sees heights in the practice of virtue which had been hidden in the clouds before, and he is not discouraged. He hopes to climb them; nay, he has a modest certainty that he shall one day stand upon those heights. He is realizing every day more and more that God loves him, and with the increase of that consciousness, all other heavenly things increase within him. But now another trouble is becoming visible in his soul. It is no bigger than a point—less than the hand which the prophet saw from Carmel. It is stealing up, like morning over the sea, without a sound, with a level gray brightness over the waters, shyly as if it were not sure of a welcome, yet gradually, as if it did not wish to take us by surprise. It has come to the man to feel that there is another sort of closeness to God from any he has thought of before. Another form of goodness is taking shape before his eyes. A tranquil dissatisfaction is mastering him. It will soon grow into a restlessness, but a restlessness which lies on a deep-hidden peace. He looks up to heaven to God, but lo! a hand is put out from the depths of his own soul and is fain to draw him gently down there. A voice without

words seems to say to him, "Not up in the blue sky or beyond it, but down here!" The Holy Ghost has given him the craving for an inward life, a new vocation, a vocation to a closer union with God and a union of another sort, a finding of God within. Happy the souls who are thus touched! Now if they will but correspond! If they can but light on one who will guide them well!

Under this divine pressure the man seeks his spiritual father. He is athirst for God, and he goes to the shepherd to show him the springs up among the hills. Woe to the shepherd if he cannot show them, from not knowing himself where they are! The inquirer naturally lays before his chosen guide all that has passed within him and is passing within him still. He tells him of the faults of his past life, as far as he can judge of himself, the faulty tendencies of his natural character. He and his guide, however, are in very different states of mind. He is engrossed in the delights of his present feelings. He is yet thrilling under the divine touch. But his guide sees onward, far onward, beyond that first range of beautiful mountains. He sees the portals of a wilderness, and, through them, the wastes of pale glistening sand. Dangers and delusions, faintings, and uncertainties, strange trials and unwonted temptations; these are the images of the future which rise to the eye of the guide. Yet he is full of sympathy. He looks with tender respect on the man whose soul God has touched. The grandest of all the signs of predestination is shining majestically round him, in this vocation to the mystical apostolate of the inward life. He could almost kneel to one on whom God's finger has so lately pressed, nay, perhaps is pressing still; only that these touches are very swift and transitory, even when their consequences are permanent and lifelong. Nevertheless, he is filled also with an affectionate anxiety, because of the numerous requirements he must make upon his disciple. He must require generosity; that is the first of indispensable things. He must exact humility, though just now he cares less for deficiencies there than in generosity. But, at all events, he must have such

material humility as amounts to docility. The growing knowledge of God will bring the rest.

These are great requirements; yet they are only two out of many. What can he dispense with, so as neither to frighten nor to burden the beginner? He need not be much afraid of frightening; for men are unconsciously brave, in whom a recent touch of God is still throbbing. But he may easily burden him overmuch, and so may even suffocate grace in the soul. Generosity and humility are very great things, but so great that at least he must have with them one lesser thing, one little thing along with them, an engine small enough to be practicable, an implement capable of working on small scales, a tool not too big to be well grasped and held tight without distracting the whole man by the mere effort of handling it. He chooses one which his disciple hardly expected, nay, at present, cannot bring himself to believe in—a taste for reading. With all the varied future, as well as imminent difficulties of his dear disciple before him, the master seems exaggeratedly anxious that he should already have, or forthwith acquire a taste for reading. To all, he will say, it is important, even inside the walls of a cloister; but to souls in the world, who have neither rule, cloister, nor superior, he will most dogmatically assert this taste for reading to be, as a general rule, indispensable to perfection, and that without it he cannot pretend to undertake the work entrusted to him.

Beginners must take many things on faith. Long before they are perfect, they will have learned that they must take all things on faith; such depths will have opened upon them as to show inscrutable difficulties everywhere. The habit of believing will have become stronger then than the habit of knowing. Men who have to learn—as all spiritual men have—that obscurity is the clearest and purest kind of light, have also other strange things to learn, and are too much engrossed to have time to be astonished. Beginners, therefore, must take for granted that their master knows what he is about when he lays such stress upon a taste for reading. Perhaps the monks of Saint Hugh of Lincoln

had to take it on faith when their saintly abbot made so much of it. His biographer tells us that it was one of his chief cares that all his religious should be provided with plenty of devout books; and books were scarce in those days. Saint Hugh was always impressing upon them the duty of reading. He even went so far as to tell them that their spiritual books were "their arms in time of war, their occupation in time of peace, their support in time of trial, and their remedy in time of sickness." Saint Ignatius went quite along with Saint Hugh in this matter. However, it is not my object at present to accumulate authorities to prove the immense importance of reading in the spiritual life. I want to explain, rather, the stress laid upon it by ascetical masters, and to make it less strange to those who think it strange. Perhaps they will thus allow themselves to be persuaded to a more generous docility in the matter.

Other things being equal, a person beginning the spiritual life with a taste for reading has a much greater chance both of advancing and of persevering than one who is destitute of such a taste. Experience shows that it is really almost equal to a grace. The hardest thing in the world is to think; that is, to think real thought. Goethe said that if men wanted to think, they must avoid "thinking about thinking." This is a fatal process, a quagmire which has sucked up generations of young men and is capable of absorbing as many generations more. The best test of a system of education is the power of thinking which it engenders in men. . . .

The power of thinking is an immense help in the spiritual life. But it belongs to the few, and is mostly the result of an excellent education which is, in this matter, as in all others, the grand natural support of the life of the Church. Next to the power of thinking, we may reckon the power of reading, or, to be less exacting, the taste for reading which, in spiritual matters, is practically the same thing with the multitude of men, as the most important of all the personal nonsupernatural qualifications for an inward life. As the power of thinking is the highest test of

a system of education, so the second test by which it should be tried is its successful creation of a taste for reading. By all persons a taste for reading is positively attainable, while the power of thinking is not so. Men who have been loosely and disjointedly educated, or educated without the cultivation of their imaginations, will have the more difficulty in acquiring this taste for reading. Still, the difficulties are not very formidable. The process is little more than one of time. There are harder things to be done along the road to perfection, and success more than repays the effort. Anyhow, whether we have the taste for reading already or whether we have to acquire it, we may be sure that he who begins a devout life without it may consider the ordinary difficulties of such a life multiplied in his case at least by ten. . . .

The mere knowledge gained by the reading of spiritual books, even books which are indirectly spiritual, is of incalculable importance. I am not speaking of erudition. I am aware that there is a consent among the great ascetics of the seventeenth century that learned persons are nearly the most difficult to lead to perfection, both because the absorption of learning engrosses their interest and interferes with habits of contemplation, and also because the process of study withers the freshness of the mind for prayer, and dries the affections as if the east wind had passed over them. But knowledge and learning are two different ideas. It is not easy to think out for ourselves even very obvious things. Reading suggests them to us. It increases the light round about us, and also the light within us. We gain time by appropriating through books the experience of others. We learn methods which shorten roads. We multiply our motives of action and we infuse new vigor into old motives by understanding them better. It is instructive to observe that when God is pleased to raise ignorant and illiterate persons to a high start of perfection He infuses into them supernatural science, making them very frequently even accomplished theologians and profound expositors of Scripture—as if knowledge must lie in the spiritual soul either as a cause or an effect of holiness, or more probably, as both. . . .

In the next place, we must take into account the direct assistance in our combat which we derive from reading books about God, and the soul, and the virtues and lives of the saints. They stir up our affections to God as we read. They elicit, by a gentle compunction, continued acts of love, or hope, or faith, or desire, or contrition. They are like inspirations to us. Silent divine voices leap into our souls from the page. Spiritual reading is itself an essential exercise. It is a special and peculiar form of prayer, the management of which is one of the important features of our spiritual day. Historically speaking, the reading of the lives of the saints has been a most energetic power of holiness in the Church for long ages. . . .

What we have now to bring forward, although it primarily concerns spiritual reading, applies also to reading which need be only indirectly spiritual. Everyone must have experienced the good effects of religious reading as connected with prayer. Prayer is the grand difficulty of most souls. Solve that difficulty and other difficulties are solved with it. Now, reading feeds and furnishes prayer. It supplies matter. It plants in the wilderness. It irrigates what it has planted. The old masters call it oil for the lamp of prayer. How often do men—not beginners only, but men far from their beginnings now,—complain that they do not know what to think about at meditation, or what to say to God! It is not too much to affirm that regular and rightly-practiced spiritual reading obviates at least half the difficulties of meditation. It is a sad thing to have been twenty years serving God, and still to be fighting with our morning meditation; although it is a comfort to think that Saint Teresa was engaged in those hostilities for seventeen years.

Reading is also of no inconsiderable service simply as an occupation of time. The use of time is one of the chief difficulties of the spiritual life. If we may distinguish the one from the other, we should be less frightened of Saint Teresa's vow "Always to do what was most perfect" than of Saint Alphonso's "Never to waste a minute of time"; and the most impressive thing in those won-

derful eighty-eight years of Saint Andrew Avellino was his never having let a moment glide by unperceived or unoccupied. It tries our faith to think of it. Now, we cannot always keep our minds on God,—I mean we who are not saints. We may doubt it of the saints, gravely doubt it; but, having no experience of sainthood, we cannot dogmatize about it. Yet, when the effort to do so would be too much for us, there are in most of our days gaps of time which would be filled up with inutilities. Inutilities would be the most innocent filling up of them, yet how spirit-wasting also! Then reading—not our regular spiritual reading, which is a more serious and direct intercourse with God, but conscientiously-chosen reading, even of a secular sort—comes in, and not only saves us from evil by being harmless, but does us a positive good in itself.

Reading takes possession of the mind, of which the evil one is always on the watch to take possession. It occupies it. It garrisons it. It peoples it with thoughts which are, directly or indirectly, of God. Now, in these days, there are two contagious influences in the atmosphere around us, which are most deleterious to the spiritual life. They are the multiplicity of interests, and the rapidity of objects. It is sad to see the success with which these two things thrust God out of our minds, perpetually edging a little more forward, a little more, and a little more. The mere occupation of our minds, therefore, with religious objects, has become of serious importance in devotion, especially to those who are living in the world, and so are forced to hear its roar and to turn giddy at the sight of its portentously-swift whirling and revolving, as if it were a machine of God got loose from His control. What has taken possession of the current of our thoughts, has taken possession of our whole lives. A taste for reading is therefore necessary for these times because of their perils and their peculiarities.

It is by this occupation of our thoughts that reading hinders castle-building, which is an inward disease, wholly incompatible with devotion. Perhaps it is speaking too broadly to say that

reading hinders it altogether, but, at least, it makes it much less likely and confines it within narrower bounds. In temptations also, it is a twofold help, both negative and positive. Negative, because all occupation involves the non-existence of a great many temptations; and positive, because it furnishes an actual distraction while we are under temptation, as well as gives us a light in our warfare with them, and a heating of the heart which prevents our being chilled by their icy touch. It also delivers us from listlessness, which is a dangerous enemy of devotion, especially to those who live in the world and have not the help of an always pressing rule and the soft uninterrupted pulsations of community acts. Toward afternoon, a person who has nothing to do drifts rapidly away from God. To sit down in a chair without an object is to jump into a thicket of temptations. A vacant hour is always the devil's hour. When time hangs heavy, the wings of the spirit flap painfully and slow. Then it is that a book is a strong tower, nay, a very church, with angels lurking among the leaves, as if they were so many niches.

From influence on the individual's thought, let us pass to society. Conversation! What a stormy sea is that for a spiritual man to navigate! Possibilities of sin everywhere, rapid flow of indeliberate words, galloping of images through the mind, indistinct in the dust they raise, impossibility of adequate vigilance because of impossibility of ubiquity, unsatisfactory helplessness in the effort to preserve general purity of intention, tongues whetting tongues, brain heating brain, faces kindling faces, rapidity at last becoming terrific, and with rapidity unguarded oblivion—while truth, justice, charity and reverence, modesty and kindness are standing round, mute listeners shy, jealous, suspicious, frightened, almost fanciful, wincing visibly now and then—and the great fact that we are talking to God with His Immensity for our room, gradually growing less and less distinguishable! Were it not so hard to be one of the silent saints, even commonly good people would gradually steal into Carthusian deserts. But reading helps to make conversation harmless, by making it less petty

and less censorious. Our books are our neighbor's allies, making it less necessary to discuss him. As a help to the government of the tongue, therefore,—that government without which, as Saint James tells us, a man's whole religion is vain—a taste for reading is invaluable.

It also makes us and our piety more attractive to those around us. Ignorance is repulsive, but I doubt if it is so repulsive as that half-ignorant narrowness of mind that characterizes persons who do not read. The world is full of objections to devotion; and its want of geniality, of sympathy with men and things is one of the chief objections to it. We may be quite sure that men have, on the whole, preached the gospel in their conversation more when they spoke indirectly on religion than when they spoke directly on it. Common interests are a bond. We are better missionaries in daily society if we have a taste for reading; and this of course does not mean spiritual reading on the one hand, nor on the other, that light reading which dissipates our spirit, sullies our faith, and makes our conversation puerile or frothy. Above all, a taste for reading is necessary for Christian parents. . . . How dull and foolish, and uninteresting, and uninfluential must children grow up if, as their minds expand, they find the conversation of their parents (as the conversation of unreading persons must be) empty, shallow, gossiping, vapid, and more childish than the children's talk among themselves! It is this which explains what we so often observe,—that a taste for reading or the absence of it, is hereditary. Furthermore, still speaking of society, a taste for reading often hinders our taking the wrong side in practical questions which are mooted in the world but tell upon the Church. It does this either by the information it has enabled us to obtain on the subject itself, or by making our instincts accurate and sensitive through our familiarity with right principles and with the subjects kindred to the one under discussion. Look how many little-minded, narrow-sighted good people get on the wrong track about the Pope and the Church, and public affairs, especially in a non-Catholic country, simply be-

cause, having no taste for reading, they are fractions of men rather than men.

Now, to go back to ourselves again, and our own self-improvement. Do we not all perceive in ourselves a tendency to become vulgar, to be interested with petty interests, to be recreated by foolish recreations, to be allured by ignoble pursuits? It seems as if, when the gay liberty and sweet clever simplicity of childhood evaporated, they left some dregs of sheer unmitigated puerility behind them, which made a shallow in the soul upon which we were ever and anon stranding. Very high spirituality sets us above all this. But which of us is dwelling in those regions? Meanwhile, a taste for reading obviously does the same work for us in another way, and naturally with inferior success, yet with a success complete in its kind and degree. It raises us. It calls out our manhood. It makes us grave. It infuses an element of greatness into everything around us. The same taste also helps us with our temper. It aids us in the supernatural work of gaining inward peace. When we are fretful and are too feeble to lay hold of higher things, we have always a self-tranquilizing process at hand in reading. But who is not fretted wellnigh daily, and wellnigh daily forfeiting graces by his fretfulness? When I said before that a taste for reading is especially necessary for these times, I said also that it was especially necessary for those leading devout lives in the world; for they are the souls who most want peace and least find it.

The spiritual life is more or less a work in the dark; but it is a darkness in which we can see. When we can see what we are doing, and whither we are going, what our work is, and how God would have us do it, we work more securely and advance more rapidly. Even when we see our end before us, we have often to arrest ourselves in life and make a deliberate election of the means best calculated to bring us to our end; and still more often have we to decide upon the character of some apparent means which may, in reality be a temptation or a distraction, either to turn us aside from the right road, or at least to hinder

our efforts upon some ascertained end. In all these cases, we derive the greatest assistance from reading. Indeed, it is astonishing how pertinent all our reading seems when we are in difficulties. It is as if the Holy Ghost, rather than ourselves, had chosen what we should read; and it is He most assuredly who gives it now such a special unction and special message to our souls in their present straits.

As a taste for reading assists by illuminating our own work, so does it enlarge our charity in judging of the work of others. The more we know, the less narrow are our minds. Our sphere of vision is increased. Our horizon is wider. We appreciate the manifold varieties of grace and of vocations. We see how God's glory finds its account in almost every diversity, and how holiness can be at home in opposites, nay, how what is wrong in this man is acceptable, perhaps heroic in that other man. Hence, we free ourselves from little jealousies, from uncharitable doubts, from unworthy suspicions, from unsympathetic cautions, from ungenerous delays, from narrow criticisms, from conceited pedantries, from shallow pomposities about others and their good works, things which are the special diseases of little great men and little good men, and which may be said to frustrate one-third, if not more, of all the good works which are attempted in the Church. Goodness which is not greatness also is a sad misfortune. While it saves its own soul, it will not let others save theirs. Especially does it contrive, in proportion to its influence, to put a spoke in the wheel of all progress, and it has almost a talent for interfering with efforts for the salvation of souls. Now, if reading did no more than abate the virulence of any one of these diseases of narrow goodness mentioned above, would it not be a huge work? For we are all of us little at times, even when we are not habitually little. Self-love makes us jealous, and jealousy makes us little. But how much more, as experience teaches us, does a taste for reading do than merely abate the virulence of these things! How many a narrow mind has it not made broad! How many close, stifled, unwindowed hearts has it not filled

with mountain air and sunshine and widened them to noble spacious halls, so making room for God where He had no room before!

Good reading also heightens our whole spiritual standing, by making us more free from human respect. When we have a taste for reading, and reading approved religious books, we acquire the sense of standing under the eye and at the judgment-seat of great and holy minds. Their judgments give the law to ours. They introduce us into another world, where right measures and true standards prevail, and where injustice and falsehood are righted in the mind, as they will be righted in fact at the general doom. Hence the judgments of that little inefficient circle immediately around us, which we surname the world, are less important, less all-in-all in our eyes than they used to be. We have got accustomed to higher things, to wider prospects, to greater worlds. He who does not suffer from the tyranny of human respect will hardly appreciate the force of this reason: but in what fortunate clime, or even in what anchoret's cell is that blissful man to be found?

Last of all, we must not forget Saint Hugh's reason for making much of good books,—that they make illness and sorrow more endurable. Doubtless what has surprised us in all of our illnesses is that they have sanctified us so little. Pain has done so much less for us than by all accounts it should have done. Our experience of the matter has not been the same as the experience of the saints. It is not so much that we have been less patient, as that we have been more animal. We have been occupied with the physical part of our sufferings. All our energies have been absorbed in the effort of endurance. Even sorrow we make too physical. Moreover, though others should not ask too much of us, neither should we overtax ourselves unwisely, yet there is no doubt we allow both sorrow and sickness to make us more idle than they need do. We waste time in suffering, when moments, always precious, are more precious than at any other time of life. Now, in the matter of patience, in the matter of inwardly sancti-

fying our sufferings, and in the matter of needless indolence, we shall find a taste for reading of great service to us both in sickness and sorrow.

"But all these are very low and very natural reasons!" True; but are we fit for higher things yet? Have we any dispensations from the earlier stages of this grand journey? Surely, if we rightly estimate ourselves, we may feel that we are too low for the lowest thing that is good; but we cannot feel that we are too high for anything. Here, then, are about twenty-six reasons why a spiritual guide is so anxious to know whether one who is just putting himself under his direction has a taste for reading. He knows by experience that this taste will practically do the work of higher graces, before we have yet reached, in the common course of things, the region where those higher graces dwell.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

6.

Eternity

A Daily Admonition

I never see the Blessed Sacrament without being reminded of the last judgment of the world. Its very merciful stillness is a continual admonition to me of that resonant pomp and burning majesty. When I hold it in my hands, I can only feel that it is my Judge that I am holding: and this seems to quicken my love rather than restrain it; and communion is the sweeter for being always in viaticum. He comes at my Mass as He came at the Annunciation, from heaven, without passing through intermediate space, swifter than lightning, yet so tranquilly. I sink on my knees and worship, as Mary's ecstasy relaxed and she genuflected to the new-born Babe. And the stillness is so still that I hear therein the clear trumpets of the far-off doom. How different will be the sensible pomp of that magnificent advent! With what ceremonious care theology gathers it all from Scripture! A celestial fire will come forth from heaven, like a gorgeous tempest, as the precursor of the Judge, a type of the fiery spirit of Elias

and the Baptist, which will involve the reprobate, and occupy the place where they are. They will wait there in the fire, the glorious, the jubilant, the vindictive fire. Then will come forth the luminous Cross, the sign of the Son of man in the heavens, beautiful, majestic, borne by angels as a standard, and visible as the rallying point of the brave saints all through the judgment. Next will follow the masses of clouds, to which Scripture so constantly alludes, and to which summer sunsets are the ravishing preludes, supernatural clouds which He lights up and beautifies by His effulgence. They throw His elect into an ecstasy of joy and terrify the reprobate; for they look like a triumphal car, though He needs them not to lean upon. Meanwhile, clear as the voice of one we love, the wailing blasts of the arch-angelic trumpets, go round the earth, and compass its uttermost ends, compelling the cold graves, and the deep sea to give up their dead. His holy angels, all of them, without exception, will be there, not one left in heaven. They will assume lucid bodies, as theologians say, for all in that great pomp is to be sensible, as it was at the Ascension, on which mystery, as the angels themselves said, the second advent should be modeled. Heaven, deserted heaven, will have again the Divine Solitude which reigned there before Creation was. Then in His beauty and His majesty, in the old glory of His Ascension, the Judge Himself will come, with His Mother and His apostolic assessors. Who shall describe His coming? He is borne somehow, as Suarez says, by the choir of Thrones, those beings of overwhelming restful strength and loveliness, resplendent and inexplicable. And here we revert again to the Blessed Sacrament. For it was these very Thrones, as Boudon tells us, whom Surin saw always around the Host at mass, those very Thrones, in whose society Angela of Foligno saw Jesus in the Eucharist, and their numbers, said she, were innumerable, thus, by their office connecting the present Sacrifice with the future Doom. His love has contrived to anticipate His second Advent. He has found out a way of being with us, even when He is far from us. To what marvelous artifices has not

His Human Nature helped Him! For it is by that nature that He is both Host and Judge. There is not one of us who will not see that pageant of the doom, and play a part therein. And where is He now, on whose beaming Countenance, and flashing Eye, and glowing clouds, and gleaming thrones, all eyes of all men will be turned, all in wonder, some in ecstatic joy and rapturous love, some in scowling hate and crouching fear? Where is He now? Let us be still, and let the Mass go on. This is He, whom presently I must lift from the corporal, and in extreme fear make strangely free with Him, the Church constraining me, and the sweetness of His own command. He is the Judge. O for the next genuflection, to throw into it a yet intenser act of faith and love!

The silence of the Blessed Sacrament seems ever to be saying, Jesus has nothing to think of but you! And the angels say, O happy you! And heaven envies us, and earth rejoices to bear the race of the sons of men. But our own soul! O perverse thing! how little it knows its own happiness! Could any misery be conceived more dreadful than that God should cease to think of us for one moment? We should drop back into nothingness. Or that He should cease to love us? It would be hell. Yet look at Him in this mystery. He puts forth all His omnipotence to hinder our forgetting Him. He exhausts His infinite wisdom to prevent our hearts growing cold towards Him. He comes into our streets, lies upon our altars, causes bells to ring and thuribles to smoke, so that at every turn we should come across Him. And yet! we who are agreed, as we call it, who believe, who love, who aim at high things, who wish one day to sit among the seraphim—how little we think of Him, how much less do we speak of Him, though we speak so much, how almost less than nothing do we do for Him! Ah Lord! Blessed Sacrament! one thing Thou hast left undone. Thou hast let our frost be stronger than Thy fire; and if it had not been so, there need have been no heaven; for we should have had all Thy glory, and with Thy glory Thy sweet humiliations too.

—The Blessed Sacrament

A Sense of Security

No one can look forward without very solemn apprehension to his final judgment. Yet it is the deliberate conviction of our best thoughts and most mature reflection that we had better leave our final doom in the hands of the all-holy God than in those of the most merciful of sinful men. Our knowledge of God does not leave us room for a moment's hesitation. Strange to say! intimately as we know our own wretchedness, and appalled as we often are by the vision of our own sins, our sense of security in the hands of God rises in great measure from the fact that He knows us better than anyone else can know us. There are so many things by which God will not judge us, and by which men would judge us, that it seems as if our deliverance from these was already half a verdict in our favor. How often in life are we accused wrongly and mistakenly! How are motives imputed to us that we never had! We lose our temper for a moment, and are judged by that fact for years to come. When we do wrong, we often struggle manfully before we give way, but men put not these invisible struggles to our account. Full of want of simplicity as we are, and far from perfect truth, we are, on the whole, always more sincere than we seem. We often have good motives for imprudent and ill-looking actions. When we often appear careless and unkind, some secret sorrow is oppressing us, or anxiety disturbing us, or responsibility harassing us. Now God sees all this rightly, and man cannot. God does not judge us by any of these things; man must. Hence it is, a strange conclusion for sinners to come to, that God loves us better than men do because He knows us better.

He judges us by our inward religious acts, which necessarily go for nothing with men. He judges us by the fructifying of His own gifts within us, a very slight portion of which ever becomes visible to men, and even that portion only partially visible. Moreover, He judges us as He sees us in His Son. He judges us by the love which Mary, angels, and saints have for us. And finally He

judges us with all our good ever collectively before Him, while our evil is interrupted by frequent absolutions, and our sins supernaturally effaced by the Precious Blood, so that by the laws of His own redeeming love He cannot see them in the same way that men see them. Thus we are most reasonable in preferring to be judged by God rather than by men. The acutenesses of their criticism are far more to be dreaded than the niceties of His justice when omnipotent love sits by as its assessor. . . . Human judgment is more rigorous than the Divine because of the ignorance and the temper of the judge. Applying God's judgment to the case of the multitude, we find what is true in our own, that largeness and allowance in the Creator's judgment which it is hopeless to look for at the tribunal of the creature.

—*Creator and Creature*

Purgatory

Beneath the earth is that strange, almost unimaginable Church of the suffering souls, a work of divine art, a creation of love which is never at fault for means to secure its ends, yet not supplementary, as nothing in creation is, but part of the great merciful design for the discipline and success of men. Over that strange life of fiery suffering and of assured love, blended in equal and equable intensities, are cast the spells of the Sacred Humanity. Nowhere is gloom so soft, nowhere are shadows so beautiful, as in the land of purgatory. There are few of the redeemed to whom the geography of that valley of expectation must not one day become familiar. But it is through the Sacred Humanity that we enter there. Jesus is our Judge as Man, not as the Word; and it is at His bidding, almost anticipated by our own love of perfect purity, that we enter there. His sentence is the gateway by which we gain access to those fires of the predestinate, a happy gateway to the land of pain, because implying a sentence of immortal happiness. We shall have seen the Sacred Humanity before we enter there. A momentary intellectual vision

of it will have passed us, momentary, yet so engraven on our souls that we can never forget it, even if our pathway of fire lies before us in perspective for centuries of earth's slow time. It is our Blessed Lord's Sacred Humanity, as the Head of creation, that the communion of saints is consummated; and it is by that communion that any help can find its road to our souls while they are imprisoned there, the captives of patiently impatient hope. It is by the satisfactions which He made in His Human Nature, that all those holy souls are gradually relieved and finally released: for even our own satisfactions would have been no satisfactions if His had not gone before. It is His Human Blood, freshly outpoured in the daily Mass, which quenches the bitter flames. It is the second vision of His Sacred Humanity, for which every soul in that soft and soundless realm of tranquil martyrdom is craving at this very hour. Purgatory is a province of our Lord's Kingdom which seems privileged to stand in peculiarly close relations to His Humanity.

Even in hell that gentle Humanity is active and energetic. Hell itself is but the consequence of the rejection of the Incarnation. There are none there but those who, with assiduous perversity have placed themselves there. There are none there whose going there it was not the intention and the wish of the Sacred Humanity to hinder. There are none there who had not the unprofitable valor to gain a miserable conquest over Jesus in order to get there. His mere Name receives there endlessly a kind of horrified worship, the unwelcome tribute of a terror that is not beautified by hope. Lucifer became the mean king of hell, a baffled inglorious tyrant, because he would not keep his glorious throne in heaven as a vassal king to the Babe of Bethlehem. It was as Man that Jesus, over whose shadow the miserable angel in heaven had stumbled in heaven, conquered hell's king on earth, and disjointed the compactness of his kingdom beneath the earth. All the clocks that strike the hour on earth, mark some new victory of the Sacred Humanity over the rebel spirit. Each grace

given is a blow struck. Each Sacrament administered is a fortress taken. Each mercy granted is a gain for heaven. Each intervention of death-bed absolution is actually robbing hell of what seems by earthly justice to be its due. Nay, down in the pit itself the Sacred Humanity is sensibly felt, like a throbbing heart, in the intolerable darkness. The skirts of His love trail over the fires, while the outcasts curse it as it passes. All the sufferings there, faithfully, eloquently, as in their immeasurable intensity they express the grandeur of the divine justice, are less terrible than they ought to be because of the merits of that superangelic Human Nature. For that Nature, ubiquitous in its benignant power, permitted master, as it were, of the resources of the Divinity, lengthens the slanting beams of the divine compassion, and prolongs them under the green earth even till they silver somewhat of that outer darkness.

—*Bethlehem*

Devotion to the Holy Souls

Some people give all their indulgences to the souls in purgatory; others keep them all to themselves; and one party has no right to interfere with the other. What business has anyone to say that we are not free to do what the Church says we are free to do? Nevertheless, I am going to take a side in this matter for the moment; I shall keep strictly to what theologians and spiritual writers have said.

Grace is such a great thing that we ought to try to increase it in all possible ways; and there are few ways in which we can increase it more rapidly than by turning satisfaction into merit. This is done by gaining indulgences for the souls in purgatory. By this devotion we acquire great spiritual treasures, and it is acceptable to God while it is profitable to ourselves. . . . In truth, he will gain immensely who shall not reserve to himself any part of his satisfaction or any of his indulgences, but shall offer them

all for the holy spouses of our dear Redeemer who are detained in those terrible pains.

Of the three things which the good works of the just include, merit, impetration, and satisfaction, the greatest of all is merit; for by it we become more acceptable to God, and more His friends, receiving greater grace and so acquiring a new title to greater glory. Doubtless, then, if a man could turn all the satisfaction of his good works into so much fresh merit, over and above the merit there was there before, he would be the gainer by it, and for this reason:—the glory of the blessed is without comparison a greater good than the pains of purgatory are an evil and so the right to greater glory is a better thing than the right to less pain. He, then, who offers the satisfaction of his good works and his indulgences for the souls in purgatory, does just this:—he converts his satisfaction into merit. In this charity is an heroic act of virtue, by which he will acquire eternal life by means of that satisfaction turned into merits which is no help at all as simple satisfaction toward eternal life. As satisfaction, it would not have helped him one iota to that, but he makes it do so by turning it into merit, and at the same time helping others. Besides the fact that glory is a greater good than purgatory is an evil, we must remember that the increase of glory is a thing which is eternal, whereas the lightening of purgatory is only temporal, for purgatory itself is merely temporal; so that the distance between the increase of glory and the lightening of purgatory is as good as infinite. And yet, to enjoy eternal goods, even in the very lowest degree, would be cheaply purchased by the endurance of the greatest temporal evils. We must add to this that we ought in all things to do that which is most pleasing in the sight of God, not seeking our own interest or convenience, but His greater good and pleasure. To please God is a better thing than to avoid suffering; yet, a man who keeps his satisfaction and indulgences to himself does so from a desire to avoid suffering; whereas, he who offers them all for the souls in purgatory thereby makes himself dearer to God, by a refinement of

love in this heroic exercise of mercy and charity, which he was not bound to, but does out of the sweet freedom of his own will.

The suffering of the holy souls is without any gain or profit to themselves, whereby they can increase their merits, and so long as they are detained in purgatory, so long is the heavenly Jerusalem deprived of her citizens, and the Church upon earth of new protectors and advocates with God. The soul that is released from purgatory is laid under a particular obligation to us, both because of the singular benefit it receives from entering all the sooner into glory, and also because of the tremendous sufferings from which it is delivered. Thus, it is bound to obtain for its benefactors perpetual graces and blessings from God. The blessed know that the good they have received is infinite, and, being most grateful, they strive to show gratitude proportionate to the greatness of their enjoyment. Thus, he who gives his indulgences to the holy souls will have so many agents in the court of heaven to look after his eternal interests; and it is a greater good for a man to secure his salvation in this life through the graces obtained for him by this multitude of heavenly protectors than to avoid the risk of being somewhat longer in purgatory, because he has given away his satisfaction and indulgences. But we gain more by the friendship of the souls we deliver; we gain the love of their guardian angels, and of the saints to whom those souls were especially devoted; and we become also more dear to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, because of His pleasure at the release of His dear spouse and her entry into celestial joy.

It is a great thing to have some one in heaven who shall love, praise, and glorify God on our behalf. He who loves God fervently and tenderly can never rest without doing all he can that the infinite Majesty of God should be exalted and glorified. Yet, with all the miseries and sins of this life, we cannot magnify and adore that most dear Majesty as the blessed in heaven. Oh, then, the joy and consolation to think that others, whom we have released from purgatory, are doing this great work for us in heaven and that, while we are still here, they have begun their

praise already! Surely, there can be no soul that has been fortunate enough to reach purgatory, which is not holier than ours, and more fitted to glorify God. And if so, then have we ourselves already put one in heaven who shall give God greater glory than we should do if we were there ourselves. While we are eating, drinking, sleeping, toiling, here on earth—there in heaven—refreshing thought! most solid consolation! is the unsleeping soul, or, please God, the many unsleeping souls, whom we have hastened thither, worshipping and exalting the beautiful Majesty of the Most High, unspeakably, incessantly. . . .

Last of all, what we are giving away comes back to us most abundantly. In this very act of such great charity and generosity, there is satisfaction for our sins; for if alms given to relieve bodily wants satisfy above most other good works, what will spiritual alms not do? Secondly, he who loses anything for the glory of God receives at last a hundred-fold; and He will either give us such grace as that we shall need little purgatory, or He will inspire others to pray for us when we are there so that, if we had kept our indulgences to ourselves, we might have been long in those fires; whereas, if God sets many to gain indulgences for us, we shall enter much sooner into glory. It is an axiom that no one loses who loses for God. And when we are in purgatory, the blessed, who by our means went sooner to heaven, will look upon us as their benefactors, and on our release as a debt of justice. Nay, it is not they only who will acknowledge the debt, but our dear Lord also.

Thus to give all our satisfactions and indulgences to the souls in purgatory is so far from being contrary to the right order of charity, that it is our best interest to do so. It is a devotion quite teeming with God's glory, and the manifold interests of Jesus, and the love of souls; and it embraces at once the Church Militant, and the Church Triumphant. Let us bless God that He has in His mysterious liberality allowed us this inestimable favor of doing what we will with our satisfactions and indulgences; so that, being our own, and at our free disposal, we may rejoice

our hearts in thus employing them to His greater glory and sweeter praise.

—All for Jesus

And a Deed is Done

There is a peculiarity in this devotion for the dead. It does not rest in words and feelings, nor does it merely lead to action at last. It is action in itself and thus it is a substantial devotion. It speaks, and a deed is done; it loves and a pain is lessened; it sacrifices and a soul is delivered. Nothing can be more solid. We might almost dare to compare it, in its poor measure, to the efficacious voice of God, which works what it says, and effects what it utters and wills, and a creation comes. The royal devotion of the Church is the works of mercy; and see how they are all satisfied in this devotion for the dead! It feeds the hungry souls with Jesus, the Bread of Angels. It gives them to drink, in their incomparable thirst, His Precious Blood. It clothes the naked with the robe of glory. It visits the sick with mighty powers to heal, and at the least consoles them by the visit. It frees the captives with a heavenly and eternal freedom, from a bondage dreader far than death. It takes in the strangers and heaven is the hospice into which it receives them. It buries the dead in the Bosom of Jesus in everlasting rest. Oh, when the last doom shall come, and our dearest Lord shall ask those seven questions of His judicial process, those interrogatories of the works of mercy, how happy will that man be, and it may be the poorest beggar among us, who never gave an alms because he had to live on alms himself, who shall hear his own defense sweetly and eloquently taken up by the crowds of blessed souls, to whom he has done all these things while they waited in their prison house of hope! Three times a day Saint Francis of Sales put himself in the presence of God as before his judge, and tried to judge himself in his Savior's way. Let us do that and we shall become so many servitors of Michael, so many guardian angels

of that beautiful but melancholy land of suffering and expectant souls.

—All for Jesus

The Theological Virtues

Devotion for the dead is a complete and beautiful exercise of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which are the supernatural fountains of our whole spiritual life. It exercises faith because it leads men not only to dwell in the unseen world, but to work for it with as much energy and conviction as if it was before their very eyes. Unthoughtful or ill-read persons almost start sometimes at the minuteness, familiarity, and assurance with which men talk of the unseen world, as if it were the banks of the Rhine, or the olive groves of Provence, the Campagne of Rome, or the crescent shores of Naples; some place which they have been in their travels, whose geographical features are ever in their memory, as vividly as if before their eyes.

It all comes of faith, of prayer, of spiritual reading, of knowledge of the lives of the saints, and of the study of theology. It would be strange and sad if it were not so. For what to us, either in interest or importance, is the world we see compared to the world we do not see? This devotion exercises our faith also in the effects of the sacrifice and sacraments which are things we do not see, but which we daily talk of in reference to the dead as undoubted and accomplished facts. . . . As the prophet and apostle say, "My just one lives by faith. But if he draws back, he will not please my soul" (Heb. 10:38). And what is faith but "the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that are not seen" (Heb. 2:1).

Neither is this devotion a less heroic exercise of the theological virtue of hope, the virtue so sadly wanting in the spiritual life of these times. For look what a mighty edifice this virtue raises: lofty, intricate, and of magnificent proportions into which, somehow or other, all creation is drawn, from the little headache

which we suffer, up to the sacred humanity of Jesus, and which has to do even with God Himself. Upon what does all this rest except on a simple, childlike trust in God's fidelity, which is the supernatural motive of hope? We hope for the souls we help, and unbounded are the benedictions which we hope for in their regard. We hope to find mercy ourselves, because of our own mercy; and this hope quickens our effort without detracting from the merit of our charity. If we give away our own satisfactions and the indulgences we gain to the souls in purgatory, instead of keeping them for ourselves, what is this but an heroic exercise of hope? We throw ourselves upon God. We hardly face the thought that we ourselves are thus sentencing ourselves, it may be, to abide years and years longer in that unconquerable fire. We shut our eyes, we quell the rising thought, we give our alms, and throw ourselves on God. Whoever trusted Him, and found his trust failed? No! All is right when it is left to God.

This devotion has to do altogether with things beyond the grave, and there is the region of hope. Its dwelling place is behind the veil. "For we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. For how can a man hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24–25). For the state of the dead is no dream, nor is our power to help them a dream, any more than the purity of God is a dream, or the Precious Blood a dream. Thus, though there be many consolations, yet it is we who have "the strongest comfort—we who have sought refuge in holding fast the hope we set before us. This hope we have, as a sure and firm anchor of the soul, reaching even behind the veil where our forerunner Jesus has entered for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech" (Heb. 6:18–20).

As to the charity of this devotion, it dares to imitate even the charity of God Himself. What is there in heaven or on earth which it does not embrace, and with so much facility and so much gracefulness, as if there were scarcely an effort in it, or as if self were charmed away, and might not mingle to distract it?

It is an exercise of the love of God, for it is loving those whom He loves, and loving them because He loves them, and to augment His glory and to multiply His praise. There are a hundred loves of God in this one love, as we should see if we reflected on those holy souls, and realized all that was implied in the final entry of a soul into everlasting bliss. It is love toward the sacred humanity, because it magnifies the copious redemption of Jesus. It honors His merits, satisfactions, ordinances, and mysteries. It peoples His heaven, and it glorifies His Blood. It is filled with Jesus, with His work, with His power, with His victories. No less is it an exercise of love to our dearest Lady, and to the angels, and the saints.

How abundant is its charity to the souls themselves, whether we give them the good measure of all the Church tells us to do, and some spontaneous alms besides; or the full measure of all our satisfactions during lifetime, which are not by justice due elsewhere, as Saint Gertrude gave them. All men living on the earth, even unconverted sinners are included in it, because it swells the Church triumphant, and so multiplies intercessors for us who are still warring upon earth.

To ourselves also it is an exercise of charity, for it gains us friends in heaven. It earns mercy for us when we ourselves shall be in purgatory, tranquil victims, yet oh, in what distress! It augments our merits in the sight of God. If this tenderness of the dead is such an exercise of these three theological virtues, and if again even heroic sanctity consists principally in their exercise, what store should we not set upon this touching and beautiful devotion!

A further excellence in this devotion is to be found in its effects upon the spiritual life. It would seem as if it were a devotion especially intended for interior souls. The fact is so full of doctrine and embodies so much that is supernatural, that we need not be surprised at the influence it exercises over the spiritual life.

In the first place, it is a hidden work from first to last. We do not see the results, so that there is little food for vain glory;

neither is it a devotion the exercise of which appears in any way before the eyes of others. It implies, moreover, an utter ignoring of self, by making away with our own satisfactions and indulgences and keeping up a tender interest in an object which does not directly concern ourselves. It leads us to think purely of souls, which is very difficult to do in this material world and to think of them too as spouses of Jesus. We thus gain a habit of mind which is fatal to the spirit of the world and to the tyranny of human respect, while it goes far to counteract the poison of self-love.

This incessant thought of the holy souls keeps before us a continual image of suffering, and not merely of passive suffering, but of a joyful conformity to the will of God under it. Yet this is the very genius of the Gospel, the very atmosphere of holiness. Furthermore, it communicates to us, as it were by sympathy, the feelings of those holy souls, and so increases our trembling yet trustful devotion to the adorable purity of God; and as, except in the case of indulgences applied to the dead, it requires a state of grace to make satisfaction for the sins of others, it is a special act of the lay-priesthood of the members of Christ.

The spirit of the devotion is one of pensiveness; and this is an antidote to frivolity and hardness, and tells wonderfully upon the affectionate character which belongs to high sanctity. Who can tell what will come, after patient years, of thus keeping constantly before our eyes a model of eagerness, unspeakable patient eagerness, to be with our dearest Lord? Oh, what a wonderful thing is the life of a fervent Catholic! It is almost omnipotent, almost omnipresent; because it is not so much he who lives as Christ who liveth in him!

It seems useless to enumerate the various ways in which we may practice this devotion. They are sufficiently known to Catholics, and to enter upon them at any length would require a volume by itself. The adorable Sacrifice and indulgences will, of course, be the principal means of our charity to the departed. It is to be wished that the beautiful devotion of setting apart the

month of November for the Holy Souls, in the same way as we consecrate the month of May to our dearest Lady, could become naturalized among us, and of universal observance. There are hardly any devotions in the Church which so suit our character and feelings in this country, as those for the souls in purgatory. Only in all our practices let us remember: what little faults good men will have to expiate; and how long the process is, where there can be no merit to abridge it or to enhance the value of sufferings.

—All for Jesus

Thoughts to be Remembered

It is said of heaven that it requires meditation before it can be known and that when a man has already acquired a habit of meditation he will not need to be spurred on by the mercenary consideration of heaven. We may answer shortly that what was practical to David and Saint Paul can hardly be too low for us. . . . But, if meditation on heaven is objectionable, anything like a scrutiny of hell is still more so. First of all, it is exciting. Did you ever try it and find it so yourself? You are only theorizing . . . rather it was saddening, sobering, subduing, snubbing: though, after all, if it was exciting, it might perhaps be the very thing for you. Most people, in the matter of religion, need the exciting.

Secondly, fastidiousness puts in its objection. As noises must be kept from invalids, so all the coarse horrors of hell must be relegated to the background and not allowed to intrude upon our calmness or our gentility. . . . Who made these coarse horrors? God! Then they must be worthy of Him and in some way manifest His perfections? Assuredly. Now, did He make them with the intention that they should be concealed and unknown? Did He wish sinners to remain in ignorance of them, so that the intensity of their punishment should take them by surprise when

they died? If so, why did He reveal them? If so, why did our meek, gentle, loving Lord talk of the undying worm, the unquenched fire, the outer darkness, and the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth? Why did He repeat His words about the worm and the fire, like the burden of a song, as if He wished to impress them upon us? Why did He bid His sweet-tongued disciple Saint John to speak twice of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? Surely He meant hell to be made much of and diligently pondered. The old spirituality which put the Four Last Things so prominently forward in its system was more evangelical than the fastidious system which proclaims the new principle of keeping out of sight those frightening objects of which the Old Testament says (Ecclus. 7:40), that he who remembers them shall never sin, and the apostles, that knowing the terror of the Lord, they persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). Is it really meant to assert that, in these polished days, religion is to be allowed no office except to soothe? Who can help being reminded of those Scriptures wherein, twice over Jeremias makes God to say, "They healed the breach of the daughter of my people disgracefully, saying: Peace, peace, and there was no peace" (6:14; 8:11); or again, where Ezekiel speaks of the spiritual directors of his day (13:18): "Woe to them that sew cushions under every elbow and make pillows for the heads of persons of every age"?

I grant that there is one thing in modern spirituality which does tend to make a definite and detailed consideration of hell unpractical. It is that its largeness, its laxity, and its opiates make everyone take for granted that he at least shall never go there. It insures salvation to any one. It bids us cast our fear, as if we already had perfect love. The question which God leaves to hang in doubt it solves and settles, in order to annihilate the doubt because it is a painful and disturbing one. . . .

We are told to be chary in bringing hell forward, inasmuch as in these days it angers men rather than cows them, and is

suggestive of temptations against faith, and of irritabilities against God's dominion and sovereignty. But at this rate we may go on keeping back first one part of God's revelation, and then another. Each age has some portion of divine truth of which it is especially impatient. God knew all this when He gave revelations to men. He does not bring forward a dispensation every century. He does not give each generation a Bible of its own. He does not condescend so far to the noisy trivialities which strut across history and call themselves the spirit of the age. Each century makes too much of itself, and is mistaken both in thinking itself so very peculiar and in considering its peculiarities to be of much consequence. If men are rather irritated than frightened by the preaching of hell, it is certainly an index that the gift of faith is less abundant or less vigorous; but it is no argument against bringing forward a part of divine truth which will find souls to save, even though others may rebel. Our Lord foresaw that His Gospel would be a stumbling-block, and Saint Paul found that it looked like foolishness to many. God knew all this and yet revealed it; and in all the nineteen centuries of the Gospel there has never been one heretofore whose spirituality was not fed from the contemplation of the Four Last Things. As to the temptations against faith, which, like exacting invalids, claim such a specialty of delicate forebearance, I get to respect them less, the older I grow. They abound in unreality. They are not infrequently a form of conceit in the young, and a mode of self-importance in the middle-aged. I have so often been taken in by them that I find it difficult to treat them as gravely as I wish to do, or to give a very careful attention to them: they mean so much less than they sound, and so much less than those who utter them imagine. I see a real, good, solid, wholesome work to be done in real, good, solid, wholesome souls, by frequent meditation on hell; and I cannot bring myself to sacrifice it to the sickly insincerities and dishonest ignorances out of which so large a proportion of temptations against faith arise.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Justice and Mercy

I do not think that if we kept in view the perfections of God, we should venture to believe, unless the Church taught us, that there was in creation, such a place as hell. When it has been revealed to us, we can perceive, not only its reasonableness, but also how admirably it is in keeping with the various attributes of God, and, not least of all, the exquisiteness of His mercy. There is an awful beauty about the kingdom of eternal punishment; there is a shadow cast upon its fires which we admire even while we tremble, the shadow of the gigantic proportions of a justice which is omnipotent; there is an austere grandeur about the equity of God's vindictive wrath, which makes us nestle closer to Him in love, even while we shudder at the vision. But to us who live and strive, who have grace given to us and yet have the power of resisting it; who have room for penance, but are liable to relapse; who are right now but at any time can go wrong; who can doubt that hell is a pure mercy, a thrilling admonition, a solemn passage in God's pathetic eloquence, pleading with us to save our souls and to go to Him in heaven? There is no class of Christians to whom hell is not an assistance. The conversion of a sinner is never completed without the fear of hell. Otherwise, the work cannot be depended upon. It has a flaw in its origin, a seed of decay in its very root. It is unstable and insecure. It is short-lived and unpersevering, like the seed in our Saviour's parable, which fell upon a rock, sprang up for a season and then withered away. Hell teaches us God when we are too gross to learn Him otherwise. It lights up the depths of sin's malignity that we may look down, and tremble, and grow wise. Its fires turn to water and quench the fiery darts of the tempter. They rage around us so that we dare not rise up from prayer. They follow us like the many-tongued pursuing flames of a burning prairie, and drive us swiftly on, and out of breath, along the path of God's commandments. O Hell! thou desolate creation of eternal justice! Who ever thought of finding a friend in thee?

Yet we cannot doubt that hell has sent into heaven more than half as many souls as it contains itself.

Even to those aiming at perfection, the thought of hell is an immense assistance. The common things of the faith are, in reality, far above all the high lights of the saints. There is no growing out of or beyond the ordinary motives and old truths of the faith, even for those who are most highly advanced or are practicing the most disinterested love. There is no habitual state in which the spiritual life can rest and stay itself up in those thin atmospheres. Besides which, there can be no bounds safely set to the self-distrust which the greatest saints should have, and are the most likely to have, of themselves. This being so, it is extremely desirable that even those, who walk by love and are aiming at perfection, should bring frequently before their minds the judgments of God, in the terrific severities of hell. There are times when we are inclined to relax our upward straining, our climbing of the steep mountain of God. Spiritual sweetnesses and periodical absences of temptation often unnerve us for fresh attacks of the Evil One. We come to do things in a slovenly and remiss way from long habit. While we grow in merits, we are getting hugely into debt to the greatness and multitude of God's mercies, and this, at times, unsobers us. Moreover, sanctity cannot grow without there being also a growing appreciation of the possible extremities of God's justice. Neither is it an uncommon delusion to think that we are beyond the fears and impressions of the senses, though our softness in mortification ought to teach us better. Next to a very clear and penetrating contemplation of the attributes of God, nothing enables us to get a true hatred of sin more than the horrible nature of eternal punishments. The frequent thought of hell is nothing less than an impulse heavenwards. The false delicacy of modern times in keeping back the scaring images of hell, while, in the case of children, it has often marred a whole education, is a formidable danger to the sanctity as well as to the faith of men.

—*Creator and Creature*

Eternal Destiny: We Make Our Own Choice

It is incredible how dear the glory of God becomes to those who are continually on the lookout for it. The very search gives them new senses whereby they can find it, while daily increasing love is perpetually sharpening their discernment. "The earth is full of thy glory." What a joy to a loving heart! But it is not enough that heaven has overflowed, and that earth is filled with the blessed inundation of His glory. We would fain wish that there should not be a nook of creation which is not full of it. Yet there is one place where that glory seems frustrated, one place from which there rises neither plaint of prayer, nor joy of praise, nor blessing of thanks, nor aspiration of desire. It is the home of those who have had their trial and lost their cause, and with it have lost God forever. Here is grace which has not borne fruit, or whose fruits have rotted upon the tree. Here are sacraments which have come to nought. The Cross has been a failure, and God's loving purposes have been successfully resisted and direfully overthrown. Yet it is of faith that God's harvest of glory out of that unutterable gloom is immense, for the lost soul is as much an unwilling worship of His justice, as the converted soul is a willing worship of His love. Neither is Jesus without His own interests there; for the pains, unspeakable as they are, nay, even in the bare thought of them intolerable, are less than the merit of sin, less than the righteous measure of punishment, and are so because of Him. The Precious Blood, in some sense, has reached even there. Neither is this horrible place without a most blessed result on the salvation of many souls, through the holy and salutary fear which it breeds in them, and the loose and low notions of God which it corrects in the unthinking. . . .

Verily it is well for our own sakes, to think sometimes of that horrid place! As truly as Fair France lies across the Channel, as truly as the sun shining on the white walls, and the gay bridges, and bright gardens, and many-storied palaces of its beautiful capital, as truly as that thousands of men and women there are,

living real lives and fulfilling various destinies, so truly is there such a place as hell, all alive this hour with multitudinous life of countless agonies, and innumerable gradations of despair. Save the blessed in heaven, none live so keen or conscious a life as those millions of ruined souls. It is not impossible that we may go there too. It is not impossible that we may have sent some there already. When we pass along the streets we must often see those who will inhabit there forever. There are some there now who were not there an hour ago. There are some now in the green fields, or in the busy towns, on comfortable beds, or on the sunshiny seas, who in another hour perhaps will have gone there. This is a dreadfully real truth.

But what if more than all this be true? What if there was once a day when we should have gone thither if we had died? What if this hour it holds more boys and girls, who have sinned far less than we have done, nay, perhaps, have sinned but once, while we have sinned a thousand times? Oh, but we may humble ourselves still more. How long should we persevere in serving God, if we were certified there was no hell? Should we have left our sins, if it had not been for hell? Oh, what a thing it is to be upon this good earth, and surrounded by all this hopeful life, when we have actually by our own hand and eye, word and thought, and evil painstaking, worked out our right and title to all this everlasting woe. Ah, just as the mist rises from the barren sea, where corn grows not and the vines can bear no fruit, and forms the clouds which are to fall in fertilizing showers over hill and dale, so from those broad seas of fire and curse, the Divine Compassion rises like a cloud to pour down streams of grace upon the souls of living men. Let no one ever turn away from the sight of hell, lest by little, and by little, and by very little, a good opinion of himself should grow up within his soul, and send him to that dread banishment at last. Indeed, it is good and very good to think of hell and of that kind wonder, that we are not already there this hour . . . all is right so far. We are

here, and we are free; but we ought to have been there, and slaves!

But if we give ourselves up to seek and find God's glory, and to make this our one occupation upon earth, must we go down to hell and learn to rejoice with those awful attributes of God which are satisfied with that terrible sacrifice? No! God be praised! This is no part of our devotion. We are creatures of hope and love. We go where God's glory is possible to us, where we can help it and advance its interests; or, if we rise into the impossible, it is only that love has carried us away into the silent eloquence of childlike extravagant desire. We have nothing to do with hell. We have seen that, of our three things, the glory of God, the interests of Jesus, and the salvation of souls, the two first may be found even there.

—*All for Jesus*

Eternal Punishment

The whole beauty of creation is in the presence of the Creator, the lives, the hopes, the joys, the possibilities of men simply in the benediction of His compassionate presence. What would the world be but sheer hell, if it were reduced to the three bare necessities of His immensity, in essence, presence, and power? It will increase our reverence to think of this. We shall value every faintest token of God's dear Presence more and more, when we see that the absence of it is no less a misery than hell. Yet how many men live without God in the world, and care not for it, and are happy, all because God is more gracious with them than they know of, and visits them with a sunny presence which they perceive not nor understand! So little is the pain of sense, intensely horrible as it may be, compared with the pain of loss, that hell may be shortly described as the one cavern of creation from which the inexorbale majesty of God withdraws all presence, save and except the necessities of His immensity.

Let us put aside the curtain of vindictive fire, and see what this pain of loss is like; I say, what it is like, for it fortunately surpasses human imagination to conceive its dire reality. Suppose that we could see the huge planets and the ponderous stars whirling their terrific masses with awful, and if it might be so, clamorous velocity, and thundering through the fields of unresisting space with furious gigantic momentum, such as the mighty avalanche most feebly figures, and thus describing, with chafing eccentricities and frightful deflections, their mighty center-seeking and center-flying circles, we should behold in the nakedness of its tremendous operations the divine law of gravitation. Thus in like manner should we see the true relations between God and ourselves, the true meaning and worth of His beneficient presence, if we could behold a lost soul at the moment of its final and judicial reprobation, a few minutes after its separation from the body and in all the strength of its disembodied vigor and the fierceness of its penal immortality. No beast of the jungle, no chimera of heathen imagination, could be so appalling. No sooner is the impassable bar placed between God and itself than what theologians call the creature's radical love of the Creator breaks out in a perfect tempest of undying efforts. It seeks its center and it cannot reach it. It bounds up towards God, and is dashed down again. It thrusts and beats against the granite walls of its prison with such incredible force, that the planet must be strong indeed whose equilibrium is not disturbed by the weight of that spiritual violence. Yet the great law of gravitation is stronger still, and the planet swings smoothly through its beautiful ether. Nothing can madden the reason of the disembodied soul, else the view of the desirableness of God and the inefficacious attractions of the glorious Divinity would do so.

Up and down its burning cage the many-facultied and mightily-intelligenced spirit wastes its excruciating immortality in varying and ever-varying still, always beginning and monotonously completing, like a caged beast upon its iron tether, a threefold movement, which is not three movements successively,

but one triple movement all at once. In rage it would fain get at God to seize Him, dethrone Him, murder Him, and destroy Him; in agony it would fain suffocate its own interior thirst for God, which parches and burns it with all the frantic horrors of a perfectly self-possessed frenzy; and in fury it would fain break its tight fetters of gnawing fire which pin down its radical love of the beautiful Sovereign God, and drag it back with cruel wrench from its desperate propension to its Uncreated Center. In the mingling of these three efforts it lives its life of endless horrors. Portentous as is the vehemence with which it shoots forth its imprecations against God, they fall faint and harmless, far short of His tranquil, song-surrounded Throne.

Four views of its own hideous state revolve around it, like the pictures of some ghastly show. One while it sees the million times ten millions genera and species of pains of sense which meet and form a loathsome union with this vast central pain of loss. Another while all the multitude of graces, the countless kind providences, which it has wasted pass before it, and generate that undying worm of remorse of which our Saviour speaks. Then comes a keen but joyless view, a calculation, but only a bankrupt's calculation, of the possibility of gains forever forfeited, of all the grandeur and ocean-like vastness of the bliss which it has lost. And last of all comes before it the immensity of God, to it so unconsoling and so unprofitable; it is not a picture, it is only a formless shadow, yet it knows instinctively that it is God. With a cry that should be heard creation through, it rushes upon Him, and it knocks itself, spirit as it is, against material terrors. It clasps the shadow of God, and lo! it embraces keen flames. It runs up to Him, but it has encountered only fearful demons. It leaps the length of its chain after Him, but it has only dashed into an affrighting crowd of lost and cursed souls. Thus is it ever writhing under the sense of being its own executioner. Thus there is not an hour of our summer sunshine, not a moment of our sweet starlight, not a vibration of our moonlit groves, not an undulation of odorous air from our flowerbeds, not a pulse of

delicious sound from music or song to us, but that hapless unpitiable soul is ever falling sick afresh of the overwhelming sense that all around it is eternal.

And all this is but the absence of God's sweet presence in His own Creation! And the Blessed Sacrament is in a most special sense His Real Presence!

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

Our Eternal Reward

Most men, especially if their family ties and domestic affections are very strong, are tempted to wish for an eternity of virtuous earth . . . a soul of developed faculties, a finer field of action, the negation of all kinds of unhappiness, and, above all, the old penates, the well-known household gods gathering round him without danger of parting or growing old. This I must heighten, modify, and spiritualize a little; but still there shall be no inexplicable Vision with its worldless beauties and its unimaginable splendors. This is the only heaven many so-called good people can reach—a truly sober heaven for unimaginative men. . . . Let us look at our promised reward, at what David calls God's retribution and let us see if looking at it will not hinder our falling so far short in the observance of the Ten Commandments and in the conscientious discharge of our relative duties. Leaving all mysteries aside, what kind of life shall we lead in heaven?

Who is not burdened by his proneness to evil? Who is not vexed with the facilities of sin? It is true we love God poorly. Yet we love Him well enough to make it a positive pain to us to offend Him. Even in our present state of low attainments there is something wonderfully attractive in a life of inability to sin. But it would be much more so if we loved as the saints loved. It will be much more so, by God's grace, before we have done. Then think also of the painful ascetic vigilance which we are now obliged to keep up. That will all be gone. There will be no

more possible discomforts of conscience. It will be the joy of our life to be secure that all we do will be sweet music and beautiful worship in the sight of God. But this is not all. Our life will be one of facility in worship, of an endless unintermitting inundation of spiritual sweetness. . . . Heaven, the lowest heaven for the lowest of us, will be a life of spiritual sweetness far beyond what the highest saints have ever experienced on this earth. Now we have to strive in order to pray. It is hard to keep our thoughts up to God. But in heaven no sort of effort will be required; we shall enjoy a most delightful facility in the most sublime and ecstatic contemplations, with the keenest sensations of delight, of which the raptures of the world's most glorious artists in the heat of their grand creations, are but an unworthy figure. All this will be continuous and unwearied, and yet ever gushing, as it were, afresh and anew from the glad soul, accompanied with such magnificent expansions both of heart and of intellect as are beyond our present dreams.

Then think of the life of peace in heaven. Peace! Peace! how unlike life, how unlike earth, how unlike the fatiguing activities of grace! How we have longed for it all through life, and long for it now, alas! more than we long for God! Imagination can hardly picture to itself a life without trouble or distrust, a life without a past to excite regrets, or a present to gall with a yoke, or a future all dim and misty in its uncertainty. The sleep of happy honest labor is an image of this delicious calm. The way in which land and sea, lakes and woodlands, as if their display of morning beauty had tired them, seem to lie down afresh and sleep in the noonday sun, is an emblem of our heavenly rest. The starry skies at soundless midnight give us a feeling which we cannot express, but which helps us to a notion of the utter peace of that blissful hereafter. Yet, after all, it is like no other peace; for it is a participation in that peace of God which overpasses human understanding. Can all this be for us? Is it actually one of our possibilities? Nay, more than that, nearer than that, likelier than that. An ocean of heavenliest peace, bound in mysterious

and glad tranquility, inviting us to sail upon its bosom, onward into brightness forever and forever—oh, if this were all, if there were nothing but this peace, is it not a sufficient reward for a long life of austerest holiness?

After the resurrection, there are the pleasures of sense. Who can tell the powers of enjoyment which there will be in the glorified bodies of the just, raised up in the likeness of Jesus? In this world of faith the senses seem stronger than God because we do not yet see Him. They lead all men captive with a passionate captivity. Other pleasures, marvelous as they are, exercise no such thraldom over our souls. The world goes wild with the intoxicating enchantments of sensual pleasures. How exquisite they are! Think of the delight of the eye in contemplating the beauties of nature, and expatiating over magnificent scenery, or feeding itself on some fascinating work of art. Or again, reflect how the ear revels in sweet sounds and is entranced with the spells of music. Hours pass, and the lapse of time is all unheeded. The rest of the outerworld has faded away and the soul hangs over the abysses of harmony, as if it would break away from the body and drown itself in the deeps of wavy sound forever. . . . All these things will be in heaven and they will be there unintermittingly. Only they will exist in infinitely higher degrees than are possible on earth. Yet all this is but a little thing to say of the glorified body. Countless kinds of new and unimaginable pleasures will be opened out to us there, each one far surpassing those of earth, pleasures worthy of the ecstacies of heaven, worthy of the magnificence of God. Moreover, we may not only give ourselves up to them with unreserved abandonment as utterly sinless; we may do more. They are not only faultless but they are fresh exercises of the grandest holiness.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

An Everlasting Te Deum

The Precious Blood makes the poor fallen earth more beautiful than the Paradise of old. Its streams are winding their way

everywhere all over the earth. The rivers of Eden are not to be compared to them for fruitfulness. Poets have loved the music of the mountain stream, as it tinkled down the hills amidst the stones or murmured under leafy shades. Scripture speaks of the Voice of God as the voice of many waters. So is it with the Precious Blood. It has a voice which God hears, speaking better things than the blood of Abel, more than restoring to Him again the lost music of His primeval creation. In our ears also does it murmur evermore, and evermore, in sorrows, in absolutions, in Communions, in sermons, and in all holy joys. It will never leave us now. For at last, when it has led us to the brink of heaven, and when, in the boundless far-flashing magnificence, the steadfast splendors and unfathomable depths of the Uncreated joy of God lie out before us, ocean-like and infinite, that Blood will still flow around us, and sing to us beyond angelic skill, with a voice like that of Jesus, which, when once heard, is never to be forgotten, that word of Him whose Heart's Blood it is, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" What is the life in heaven, but an everlasting Te Deum before the Face of God? But there also, as now in our Te Deum upon earth, we shall have a special joy, a special moving of our love, when we call ourselves "redeemed by the Precious Blood"; and, as we do now in church, so there in the innermost courts of our Father's House, we shall only say the words upon our knees, with a separate gladness, and a separate depth of adoration.

—*The Precious Blood*

God's Ovation to the Saved

Let us think once more of heaven. How cheerfully the thought of that bright home can humble us! What can be more wonderful than the contrast between man paying God on earth and God paying man in heaven? We have seen the misery and unworthiness, the scantiness and meanness, the coldness, the reluctance, the distraction and ungracious delays of the creature with the Creator. And then comes death! A good death is one in which

we feel that hitherto we have never done anything good at all, but in which we seriously, though with alarming self-trust, intend, if we survive, to begin to do good. And, considering the greatness of God and the vastness of our obligations to Him, this is by no means a fiction even to the Saints. We die, and in dying we fall into the hands of His justice, and there, fresh wonder of created love! we find far more than mercy. Our Guardian Angel could scarcely let us into heaven if he wished, were he the judge. The Mother of Mercy would have to borrow the Sacred Heart of Jesus, before she could see things as He sees them, and award a crown to us. If there could be shame in heaven, how should we be overcome with confusion appearing there with the miserable tribute of our interested love and of our wisely selfish fear! But how does the Creator, the King of kings receive His tribute? He bursts forth all divinely into triumph, because a half-converted sinner has condescended to accept His grace. He bids the angels rejoice and hold high feast through the empyrean heaven, not because He has evolved some new and wonder-stirring system out of nothing, not because He has called into being some million-worlded nebula, and cast upon it such effulgence of His beauty as throws all the rest of His creation into the shade—but because one wretched, unworthy, offensive man has, after an immense amount of divine eloquence and pleading, consented to take the first step toward not being damned, one outcast of human society, who has drunk his fill of every vice, has graciously condescended, for fear of hell, to accept heaven! These are the Creator's triumphs, these the ovations of everlasting and all-wise mercy. And God can do nought unworthy of Himself. He cannot demean Himself. Abasement is impossible to Him. Nothing can sully His incomparable purity. Nothing can He do which is not infinitely worthy of Him, worthy of His power, His goodness, His wisdom. And therefore, this triumph, this feast of the angels over one sinner that does penance, is altogether worthy of the adorable majesty of the eternally blessed God! Oh, who would not weep over the wonders of creative love, mystery after mys-

tery, at every turn giving out fresh treasures of tenderness, compassion, and magnificence?

Watch that soul which is just now entering heaven. Can anything be more amazing than the caresses that God is lavishing upon it? Heaven itself has almost grown brighter by its entrance, and the anthems of the redeemed have sounded forth with a more full sonorous melody. Mary on her throne has been filled with joy, while an exulting thrill of sympathy ran through all the angelic multitudes. And why do they rejoice? Because there is a new joy for God, another glory for His complacency to rest on. It is the salvation of that soul that has just entered heaven. Some fifty years of the full use of reason it lived on earth. The world was its delight, wealth almost its idol. It drank its fill of various pleasures, and thought not of the goodness out of which they come. Many times the divine law came across that man's path, and when it did, he straightaway, and with little reflection, transgressed it. He loved luxury, denied himself nothing, and was not over-bountiful to the poor. He was surrounded by comforts, as a city is encompassed by its walls. He had sorrows and troubles, who has not? But they were light and infrequent. The world smiled upon its votary. He was popular with his fellows. He had all that his indolent ambition cared to have; and, best of all, he was blest with almost unbroken health. There was at last almost the weariness of satiety about his undeviatingly prosperous fortune. Disease came and his old joys ceased to be joys at all. He had nothing then to tempt him from God but everything to draw him nearer to Him. Fear also, with the belief of hell wrought strongly upon him; and by the help of priest and sacrament, together with the grace of a very moderate sorrow, he put together in some ten days the dregs of half a century spent in the service of the devil and the world; and he has now gone through a very circuitous path in purgatory to heaven to offer God this refuse of his probation. And heaven keeps feast for this! And the great Creator takes almost with avidity the leavings of the world, counting for chivalry the querulous helpless-

ness of a sin-enfeebled soul. There is not one word of reproach, one look of discontent. Coupled with His extraordinary mindfulness of minutest services, God is seemingly forgetful how all good is but His own grace. Moreover, He is, as it were, blind to the fact that the man was, after all, doing what was best for himself, and even then with amazingly little of self-indignation or of righteous zeal. See! His arms are around that deathbed penitent. He is telling him the secrets of His love. He is sealing for him with a Father's kiss the eternity of his beatitude. That man will lie forever bathed in the beautiful light of the Godhead!

Is this credible? Should we dare to believe it if it were not of faith? O wonderful, wonderful God! of whom each hour is telling us something new, making premature perpetual heaven in our hearts! It is an old history that love makes the Creator seem to put Himself below His own creatures; it is an old history, yet it surprises us almost to tears each morning as we awake. So here we come to a Servant-God, like the Incarnate Servant-Savior, Jesus Christ. And yet there are men to whom God is a difficulty! There are men who think hard thoughts of Him, whose only trial of us is in the prodigious excesses of His love, which wearies and outstrips at times the slowness of our faith. O Heavenly Father! it is the greatness of Thy goodness which bewilders our humility by mocking our knowledge of ourselves; and that is the only difficulty we find in Thee. Oh, let it grow still more difficult, still more beyond our grasp, for therein is our eternal life!

What, then, is the conclusion to which we come about this repaying of our love by God? It is simply this. In the first place, He has made His glory coincide with our interests. Secondly, from a privilege, He lowers love into a precept, and this one act is complete revelation of Himself. Thirdly, He so puts our interests into His that it is hard to look at His interests only, without falling into heresy. Do these conclusions solve the five questions we have been asking? No, but they lead to the one answer of all the five, only that, ending as we began, the answer is itself a mystery. Saint John states it; no one can explain it; earth would

be hell without it; purgatory a paradise because of it; we shall live upon it in heaven, yet never learn all that is in it;—God is love!

—*Creator and Creature*

The Way to Divine Love

Nothing is easy which we are not happy while we are doing. Have you been happy in your religion? Far from it! It has been a simple burden to you. If it had not been for heaven and hell, you would have made short work of it long since. But heaven and hell are facts; there they are; and there is no help for us. As, then, we must be religious, I am for a happy religion. I see no use in an unhappy one, if God gives me my choice. But He has done more than that. He wishes me to be happy in my religion. Nay. He wishes my religion to be the happiness and sunshine of my life. Now a happy religion means a religion of love. Everything comes easy to love. Thus, I am dependent for my happiness on no one but Jesus. My religion makes me happy all the day long. If serving Jesus out of love were some prodigiously difficult thing, like the contemplation of the saints, or their austerities, then it would be another matter. But the fact is, it is nothing of the kind. To serve God because you are afraid of going to hell, and wish to go to heaven, is a great blessing, and a supernatural work; but it is very difficult. Whereas, to serve God because you love Him is so easy that it is hard to account for so many men in the world neglecting to do it. Stupid souls, so miraculously blind!

And what is a further blessing is, that what makes you happy makes our dearest Lord happy also; and the thought of this again makes us so happy that we can hardly contain ourselves, and then that again makes Him happier still. And thus religion gets sweeter and sweeter. Life is one long joy, because the Will of God is always being done in it, and the glory of God always being got from it. You become identified with the interests of Jesus; you wed them as if they were your own, as indeed they

are. His spirit steals into you and sets up a little throne in your heart and crowns itself, and then most sweetly proclaims itself king. It gained the crown by a dear conspiracy; you never suspected what divine love was about all the while. But so it is. Gods' glory becomes dear to you; you get quite touchy about our Lord, for He is become the apple of your eye; and you are drawn to save souls because it is what He is always doing, and so you get an instinct and a taste for it yourself. And so it goes on; and so you live; yet not you, but Christ lives in you; and so you die. You never suspect you are a saint, or anything approaching one. Your life is His with Christ in God, and hid from no one more than from yourself. You are a saint indeed! Your humility would either laugh or be frightened at the bare thought. But, oh the depth of the mercies of Jesus! What will be your surprise at His judgment seat to hear the sweet sentence, to see the bright crown! Why, you will almost argue against your own salvation! Our Lord makes the elect do so in the Gospel: Lord, when saw we Thee hungry, and fed Thee? When saw we Thee thirsty, and gave Thee drink? They cannot make it out. In all their love for Jesus, they never dreamed it was so great a thing as this. Ah! only serve Jesus out of love! You cannot beat God in the strife of love! Only serve Jesus out of love—and while your eyes are yet unclosed, before the whiteness of death is yet settled on your face or those around you sure that that last gentle breathing was indeed your last. Oh! what an unspeakable surprise will you have had at the judgment-seat of your dearest Love, while the songs of heaven are breaking on your ears, and the glory of God is dawning on your eyes, to fade away no more forever!

—All for Jesus

Life in Heaven Is a Life of Love

The sweetest of all earthly joys is love and the life in heaven is a life of love. Love, more than any human passion, has controlled the destinies of the world. It has been historically the greatest natural motive power on earth. Nay, what of natural

brightness each life of man on earth possesses—whence comes it, if not from love? What should we be at this moment if we had none to love? How all our light would become darkness for a while, until our eyes could bear the light of God! Not to have God to love is hell. Yet the love of all passionate lovers on earth thrown together could not equal the love of the lowest and the calmest soul in heaven. Eternity will give us more powers of loving. We shall love with some great nameless love, of which parental, filial, conjugal, fraternal loves only represent some portions or some elements. The jubilee of this immense power of loving is inconceivable. The objects of our love will be multiplied ten thousandfold; and yet, the very multiplication of its objects will only quicken the intensity of the love. Then consider that the whole of this ocean of affection will always be poured out gloriously in the immortal vehemence of a spotless love, unutterably blissful because unutterably holy.

If we were bidden to say which were the greater joy, to love or to be loved, it would be hard to give a judgment. We all crave for love. Our whole nature expands under its influence. It gives us new characters. It converts the deepest misery into happiness, and it makes heroes out of cowards. So far as our pleasure is concerned, there seem to be no limits to our capabilities of receiving love. What an amount of it we can drink in even now and here, while our souls are undeveloped and our lives narrow and our hearts shallow compared with what they will be! Surely then, in heaven we shall be able to absorb oceans of love; and as surely there will be oceans to absorb. Each one of the Blessed will love us with a might of love far beyond all earthly love and the Blessed are innumerable. The wide, strong fiery natures of the angels will be poured out upon us in love—a love which we cannot now define, but a love more deep, more beautiful, and more possessing than human love; and of these angels there are legions upon legions. Who can think of the bliss of that love with which the sinless Mother of God will endow us? No fond earthly mother, rapt in the exclusiveness of an excessive love, ever hung over her first-born and her only-born with a fondness

like to that which the Mother of Jesus will testify to each of the redeemed. Shall I dare to speak of the Sacred Humanity, or of how we shall share in the love which Peter once enjoyed upon the shores of Genesereth, or John when he leaned upon the Bosom in which the Sacred Heart was beating? We have no measures for a bliss like that. Yet all this put together, saints, angels, Mary, Human Heart of Jesus—it is not such a love as the one which awaits us. Glorified as we shall be, we shall still be little, finite, weak, and yet out of every Perfection of the immense, omnipotent, all-knowing, all-holy, incomprehensible, jubilant God there will flow into us torrents of bewildering love in perpetual inundations, overpowering us with thrills of a vast new life, taking away our breath, and suspending all the faculties of our souls far, far, up amid unthought-of regions of light in ecstasies of an incomparable beatitude, like to the Beatitude of God Himself. We shall be eternally swallowed up in eternal love. . . .

What a life to lead! But is this heaven? I answer both Yes and No. It is the poor part of heaven. It is the minor joys of heaven. It is the secondary accompaniments of the real grand joy. It is heaven with heaven left out, heaven without the Beatific Vision of our dear God. I have not even dwelt upon the spiritual blessedness of heaven because I should have had to imply the Vision. Yet what a life does even this faint, thin, weak, overclouded, lower heaven present to our minds! If we were continually meditating upon it until we familiarized ourselves with it, would it not marvelously draw us onward toward God? Would it not exorcise many a spirit of worldliness which now dwells contentedly amidst the unrealities of our spiritual life? Above all, would it not breed in us a far deeper abhorrence of sin, a far more genuine spirit of inward repentance, a far more abiding sorrow for our miserable, ungenerous past? Yet who are they who have reached that fair haven of their peace? Those, and those alone, who on earth took up the Cross, and took it up daily, and so, and only so, and always so, have followed Christ.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

7.

Devotions

Individual Attractions

Any special drawing in devotion is a gift from God. It is one of the most powerful of all the secret influences of the spiritual life. It is therefore of great importance to a man not to mistake or overlook such a heavenly attraction. Such a mistake is like a man missing his vocation. Every man doubtless has a vocation, so every spiritual man has a devotional attraction, or a succession of them. For a spiritual man is one who dwells inwardly in the supernatural world, amid God's mysteries and revealed grandeurs. He is not a mere tourist who is struck by the sublime or the picturesque of theology, and admires the scenery as a whole, and has not such a familiarity with it as to enable him to break it up into separate landscapes, nor time to brood tranquilly over any of them so as to have a rational predilection for them. He dwells in the world of theology. He is like one whose fixed abode is in grand scenery. He sees it in the morning light and in the sunset's glow. He knows how it looks when the misty calm of summer

noon is wafting fragrance over wood and water. He is familiar with it in the vicissitudes of storm and calm. When the distant mountains are hidden by summer's impenetrable rampart of green leaves before his window, he feels that they are there, and that winter's leafless woods will let them in upon his sight. He knows how the faces of the mountains change, according as the light strikes them in the front or from behind, and how a stranger, who has seen them in the morning, would, in the evening, spite of all landmarks, be doubtful of their identity. He cannot help having preferences. Predilections are almost a necessity to him. Or, at least, he must honor, like a true poet, each coming season with an admiration which seems, if it only seems, to do injustice to the season that is past, like the souls who, in devotion, follow the calendar of the Church, and honor most the feast under whose shadow they are sitting. So it must be to those to whom the supernatural world is a genuine home. Their life is a life of loves, and therefore of predilections also.

All spiritual souls are thus haunted souls. They see sights which others do not see, and hear sounds which others do not hear. This haunting is to them their own secret prophecy of heaven. It would be sad to miss so choice a grace by inattention, sadder still to follow a fantastic delusion of earth instead of the heavenly reality. The soul cannot hear God unless it listens for Him, and listening is the devoutest attitude of a wise and loving soul. Yet they who listen hear many sounds which others do not hear, many sounds for which they themselves are never listening. There are false sounds on earth which have a trick of heaven in them. They are like the phantom-bells that ring for vespers, as from viewless convents, in the wilderness of Zin. Yet the Bedouin deems that, with his practiced ear, he can discern their thin tolling from the real sounds of the sandy solitude. The avoiding of delusion is not the whole of safety in the spiritual life. When a man turns his entire life into a cautious self-defense against imposture, he is leading perhaps the falsest life a man can lead. There is more danger in missing a grace from God than in mis-

taking an earthly beckoning for a divine. For in the last case, purity of intention soon rectifies the error, while in the other, the loss is for the most part irretrievable. Even in the natural life, and in the spiritual life much more, they are the most unfortunate of men who linger behind their lot. They are like those who loiter behind the desert caravan. Straightway, as Marco Polo tells us, a shadowy voice calls them by their name, and allures them to one side of the route. They follow, and still it calls, and when they have wandered from the path, a mocking silence follows, more terrible than the deceiving voice. The wind of evening has lifted the light sands, and quietly effaced the marks of feet and camel-hoofs upon the wilderness, as the breeze ruffles out the wakes of ships on the yielding deep, and smooths the water by its ruffling. They have missed their vocation. It is no use their living now. They might as well lie down and die. Such are they, who in the spiritual life linger behind their grace. They of all men are the most haunted by delusions, and have the least discernment by which to tell them from realities. A soul that has let grace outstrip it will never see its caravan again. It may die with God; for God is in the wilderness; but faint indeed is the chance of its not dying in the wilderness. Let each man look well to see if he has not within himself a leading from God; and if he has, let him know that it is his one saving thing to follow it.

—Bethlehem

Confidence in God

What has God done that His creatures do not trust Him? We cannot trust ourselves, neither can we do without trusting. We cannot hang suspended in space, from nothing and over nothing. It is plain we cannot trust each other. Confidence in God is meant to be the creature's life. Without it, we had better disbelieve whatever we do not see, while we can do no better than acknowledge that all we see is a burdensome enigma. But how is life to be lived without confidence in God? We came out of His Hand.

It is true He has in some sense loosened His hold upon us, but it is only for a while. He will take us up again. We came from Him, we are going back to Him. There are but two eternal homes. They are both the work of His justice. One or other of them is inevitable. But one of them is rather an endless end than a home. We cannot fly from Him. What shall we do if we cannot trust Him?

Yet confidence in God is far from common, and an adequate confidence most rare. It would be a terrible thing to say that the worship of God is rare among men; yet confidence is the only real worship. Our confidence is our religion. It is the sweetness of life. It is worth our while to have lived, if it were only to have known the delight of trusting in God. But it is not our joy only. It is our absolute necessity, and therefore belongs to the lowest of us. It is our only true perfection and therefore belongs to the highest of us. Let us try to bring this home to ourselves. It is one of those commonplace things which are of the greatest importance and yet need continual repetition. When we look even at good men, we see that what they want is confidence in God. Bishops want it, priests want it, religious want it. It is the want in the piety of almost everyone. Our very confidence in God is wanting in confidence. Yet, if confidence is the only true worship, things must be very far from being what they ought to be, even with the servants of God. . . .

Few persons are aware of the extent of their own deficiency in this respect. Most persons take the matter so completely for granted that they do not suspect themselves, and therefore do not examine themselves on the subject. There is something so monstrous in not trusting God, that we should have thought it must be a rare thing among good people. But experience teaches very differently. Many aim at perfection and few attain it. In almost every case the reason of the failure is the want of confidence in God. Many persons live for years always intending to begin to form habits of prayer or habits of particular examination of conscience, and never really begin either the one or the

other. The real cause of this procrastination is want of confidence in God. Men try to give up habits of sin, and either intermit their efforts, or abandon them entirely through want of confidence in God. When a man is scrupulous, it is mostly from a want of confidence in God. Our knowledge of our own misery, which makes us brave when we have confidence in God, makes us cowardly and mean-spirited when we are destitute of that confidence. Many persons take up supernatural views of things as intellectual convictions; and yet, when they are thrown into circumstances which, as it were, compel the acting on these principles, we behold not a vestige of them in their conduct. This also is the result of a want of confidence in God. We really, far more than we believe, look at religion, at prayer, and at grace as if the whole was a lottery or something like it. A real believing prayer is by no means common. This is probably the reason why such an immensity of prayer seems unanswered. Many men content themselves with a mere indeterminate hope, which can never carry heaven by storm as confidence does. Let us look into ourselves and see if we have true and solid confidence in God. Many remain beginners all their lives because they have not confidence in God. . . .

Confidence is not a mere feeling; it is rather a faith. But it has something more than faith in it; it is a kind of sight. It adds to hope the character of assurance. It goes beyond a common habit of charity, and appears to have some distant affinity with confirmation in grace; and, however distant, such an affinity is incalculably precious. It is rather the result of our whole religion than the offspring of any one virtue. It makes us familiar with God; yet, rightly considered, it is rather a form of reverence than a form of familiarity. It is what comes of the fear of God when that fear is wholly a grace. It is the beauty of heavenly fear. It is also no less a form of humility. It is humility in its exact balance, not sinking into cowardice on the one hand, nor mounting into presumption on the other. Confidence is the manliness of a humble soul. It is also the strength of love—not its effort

or its impulse, but its abiding, constitutional strength. It is love chastised and therefore equable and steadfast. It is so eminently its nature to be practical that it can never remain only a sentiment or a pathos, or an inward smoothing of the soul. It breaks out into action as if it could not be kept in; and, like the bodily vigor of youth, it is often scarcely conscious of its own exertions. Moreover, it is the happiness of religion, that sunshine in which perseverance is comparatively easy, that light in which all the virtues combine properly and have ample room and fair play, the atmosphere in which delusion, depression, discouragement, and indiscretion are, to our relief, least at their ease. It also has the same irresistible tendency to prayer which it has to action. It is almost prayer itself, that unintermitting prayer of which the gospel speaks, and which, of all things commanded, looks the most like an impossibility. But, more than this, it seems to make direct prayer the necessary center of the soul. It is always gravitating to prayer. A soul possessed with this confidence feels an uneasiness, and has a sense of being held back, when it is not at prayer. No sooner is the pressure of distracting occupation removed than it almost insensibly glides into prayer. It has no vacant time, because its spare time is, as it were, naturally prayer. It does not so much strive to pray as it lapses into prayer. Last of all, although it is more congenial to some natural dispositions than to others, it is peculiarly a gift of God, and not a natural disposition; yet, more than most gifts, it has to be earned like wages. It is essentially a grace; yet no grace has more of the nature of an acquisition. . . .

All our spiritual exercises, of whatever nature they may be, are so many means of acquiring confidence in God. They all unfold more and more the nature of grace and of the poverty of our own nature. They all bring experiences of Jesus into the soul and each of these experiences is a new ground of confidence in Him. Outward temptations help us. They frighten us away from self-trust. They make us better acquainted with the possibilities of sin. They lead us to try all methods of keeping right and when

we have exhausted them, we find that confidence in God wears, and endures, and succeeds. Inward trials lead to the same result, only still more swiftly and more infallibly. God's arms are more closely folded round us in interior trials than in the sensible sweetnesses of His consoling visitations. A much-tried man is always a man of unbounded faith and of confidence in God. Direct prayer for grace is likewise an obvious means of its increase. Sacraments, especially carefully prepared confessions have a peculiar power to increase and reinforce this gift.

Let us think a little of the practice of confidence in God. The constant profession of it must be a great part of prayer. It is so completely a part of the worship due to God that we must profess it even when we do not sensibly feel it. We must extend it to everything that happens to us. All the events of life, all the things of this outer world must come under its influence. In truth, there is good reason for it because, after all, human wisdom and worldly prudence are nearly as impotent in the common affairs of life as they are in our spiritual warfare. Is it not our experience that it is always God who does things for us, even those things which we seem most to do for ourselves? Much more then must all our interior life be brought under the sovereignty of this tranquilizing yet animating confidence. Our trust must be incessant, universal, prudent and bold. In divine things there is no prudence which is not bold. It must live and work in the dark as briskly as in the light. It must be gay, playing blithely with difficulties; for difficulties are the stones out of which all God's houses are built. Our whole generosity with God is the measure of our confidence in Him. To sum it up in one word—in the pursuit of sanctity confidence is progress.

Oh that we could inspire each other with more confidence in grace as a certain aid and an unfailing fountain! Happy is he who makes one other man trust God more than he did before! He has done a great and influential work in creation. Happy we, if we know how to trust God as He should be trusted. A child with his mother is full of innocent, respectful liberties. He never doubts

of gaining his end. He never anticipates a refusal till it actually comes, no matter how often it has come before. He was refused yesterday; so he feels sure today. If refused, he persists with the persuasions of a not disobedient love, and argues with a playful smile. When he is definitely refused, he goes up to her, and kisses her, and runs away as happy with his mother's affectionate will as if he had got what he wanted. So must we venture to be with our Eternal Father.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

Our Heavenly Father

There is something especially reliable or trustworthy in paternal love. Other love may seem more quickly excited, or more outwardly demonstrative, or less checkered with shades of austerity, or less chastened with fear, or sparing in its words. But there is something ultimate in a father's love, something that cannot fail, something to be believed against the whole world. We almost attribute practical omnipotence to our father in the days of our childhood. There is always against everybody an appeal to him, whose judgment is infallible, whose decision is certain to be on our side, and who has means of his own to execute his sentence irresistibly. Fire will not burn us if he is near. The thunderbolts must turn aside when they see him. The high winds can only rock us to sleep, the rough seas are only laughing at us, and we can have them punished when we will. Nightly terrors disappear in his arms, and even ghosts from the land of death dare not pursue us there. A mother's love, dear as it is, is not a thing like this. This love is a picture of our dependence on our Heavenly Father; for with Him we are always children, not on this side of the grave only, but on the other also. Heaven is eternal childhood in the mansion of our Father. Many children who fear their fathers, will yet take liberties with them which they will not take with their mothers. Their very fears lean upon their father, as completely as their love. Thus, timid

and daring at once, we feel so at liberty with our Heavenly Father, that it seems to us, in our weak way of conceiving things, as if we were more at home with Him than with the Word or the Holy Spirit. The Word has to be veiled in flesh that He may not frighten us with His splendor, and the Father will take us by the hand and teach us the Word. The Holy Ghost is inexpressibly dear to us; but we are afraid of Him because of the possibility of the unpardonable sin, because of His sharpness with Ananias and Saphira, and also because we ourselves know something of the sensitiveness and jealousy of His grace. Yet the Son throws His fraternal arms of flesh around us in the embrace of His love; and the Holy Spirit is fain to nestle like a dove in the bosom of our souls. What then must be the feeling of the tenderness of the Father, to whose justice we dare to confide ourselves and our eternity, as placidly as if He could not, if He would, cut off the entail of our eternal inheritance? Words cannot tell what that word says, and sings, and shows, and works within our souls—Our Heavenly Father.

Indulgence is the grace of justice and it is something more than mercy. Is indulgence, then, an Attribute of the unutterably holy God? An indulgence infinitely holy, the indulgence of omnipotence, the indulgence of unspeakable justice, the indulgence of eternal love,—what can be conceived more beautiful, more ravishing? Yet this is the Eternal Father. He, who lives only for Himself, seems to live exclusively for us. He who is adorably self-sufficient, only finds His sufficiency in the poverties of our love. He will merge all His royalties in the single prerogative of His Fatherhood. His length, His breadth, His depth, His height —all are in His compassionate Paternity. To Himself, as well as to us, His Paternity is enough. He will take no mission, He will fill no office. He will exercise no judgment. "*Pater enim non judicat quemquam*—the Father judgeth no one" (John 5:22). He will only be to us indulgence, repose, reward, a Father, a Bosom, a Home. O Father! of all fathers the most fatherlike! O uncreated tenderness! O plenitude of paternal fondness! O dearest and most

blessed Person! so clearly seen, yet so adorably invisible, so very near in love, yet so far off in majesty! How can we praise Thee but with our silence, how can we love Thee, but by the passionate confession of our impossibility to love Thee worthily? Sweet Babe of Bethlehem, show us the Father. It will be enough for there is no more possible that we can crave. It will not be more than enough; for less will not content our craving. Simply, as St. Philip said: He is enough, the Father is enough!

Our relationship of brothers to Jesus is very sweet, and has an independent sweetness of its own. But it also opens our way deeper for us into the paternity of the Father. We are more His sons because we are brothers of Jesus. He is more our Father on that account. The Sacred Humanity has glorified us all with its own excellent filiation. As in the days of Bethlehem the Father imparted the shadows and right of His blessed paternity mysteriously to Mary and Joseph, and thus made the region of the Infancy so glorious and so heaven-like, in like manner now He will not leave us without similar consolations. He imparts them to His priests in their relationship to our souls, and, above all, in respect to the Blessed Sacrament. It is part of our Father's love that inside the pale of the Church earth should be one perpetual and even ubiquitous Bethlehem. The Infant Jesus, the joy of the Father, and our joy, is forever there and in Him the Father declared with rare expletive that He was *well* pleased. Still on the altar and in the tabernacle the Babe of Bethlehem is increasing the glory of the Father. Still is He giving breadth and space to His Father's love by the multitude of the redeemed. Still is He furnishing His Father with new opportunities of communicating His Paternity to new children and in new graces. Still is the novelty of the service and the love which the Father received from the Babe of Bethlehem as new as ever, if not more wonderfully new upon the altar. Still is every Mass illustrating all the Father's perfections in that work of His predilection, the work of abbreviating His long eternally spoken and unbrokenly uttered Word. By the Father's love we live in Bethlehem. Little Bethle-

hemite Calvaries we find there, whereon love tenderly crucifies us, sparing more than it punishes, and punishing, not to punish, but that it may more abundantly reward. To the great Calvary we never go. The Father laid that only on our Eldest Brother. It is not for such as we are. Our homes are Bethlehem and Nazareth. We have our Desert and our Egypt for seasons; but only the shadow of Calvary. More than the shadow of it our Father cannot bear should fall upon us. How can we say what we feel of this benignity of our Father? We will think of Mary and yet say that when a father is indulgent, he is more indulgent than a mother. Little ones treat their mother as the authority of rule, and their father as the authority of dispensation; and mothers are well pleased their children should use them so, in order that they may thus childishly express the love they bear their fathers, which is all too great for their little words to hold. It is a mother's noblest joy to watch her child increasing in love of its father and in its father's love.

—*Bethlehem*

The Holy Ghost

In devotion we have to receive as well as give; to receive more than we give. In truth, from first to last it rather seems to be mostly receiving and little giving. The exercise of devotion finds its chief theater in prayer; and inspirations are God's side of prayer. We must not always be speaking, we must be listening also. We must pause from time to time and make all quiet in our hearts, that we may not lose the heavenly whispers that come floating there. I am not speaking now of extraordinary mystical colloquies but of what will pass in the souls of all recollected men at prayer. As soon, says Saint Gregory, as an inspiration touches our soul, it elevates it above itself, represses the thoughts of temporal things, and quickens the desire of things eternal, so that it is delighted with heavenly things only, and weary of earthly; and such a height of per-

fection does it communicate to the soul, that it likens it to the Holy Ghost; for, as Scripture says, "what is born of the spirit is spirit." These inspirations are some of the actual impulses of the Holy Ghost and they may be called the very necessaries of life to those who are aiming at perfection. They are wanting them nearly all the day long; for, as it is by habitual and actual grace that we live the life of grace, obeying the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, so it is by the habitual gifts of the Holy Ghost and His actual impulses and inspirations, super-added to grace, that we live the lives of perfect men and of ascetics who are training for perfection. These inspirations are not chance things, or rare, or what are technically called spiritual favors. We must beware of confounding them with these. They are our daily bread. They are to perfection what grace is to virtue. They flow into us whether we hear and feel them or not, in an almost unintermitting stream. Before we gave ourselves up to God without reserve we had them frequently, more frequently than careless sinners, who nevertheless have them very often in right of their baptism; but now they flow into us in an almost unintermitting stream. One great mystical theologian calls the gifts of the Holy Ghost the seven sails of the soul in which it catches the various breezes of inspiration, and so navigates the sea of perfection.

—*Growth in Holiness*

Grace in Mary's Soul

A single grace from God is a marvelous thing. Theologians have said that one Communion is enough to make a saint. Even in the very commonest graces experience sometimes enables us to discover the most manifold capabilities, the most incredible power of duration, the most extraordinary empire over the soul. It seems occasionally as if a single grace was sometimes a fountain of spiritual miracles within us, or had power enough of itself to turn the helm of our whole lives, and to contain all heaven and the width of eternity within its own compass. A saint perhaps

corresponds to a thousandth part of his grace, we to much less. So far is our meanness, even when it strives, from matching the free magnificence of God. But a grace corresponded to instantly brings another grace, that another, and so on through an endless series rising in number, in multitude, in beauty, and in efficacy. Thus the irresistible swiftness of the process of sanctification dawns upon us almost as a thing to fear. The possibilities of sanctity cannot be thought of without trembling. The holiness of creatures dazzles us, while the holiness of the Creator seems ever removing and removing farther off from us, at the very time it is drawing us onward toward itself in breathless adoration. But our imperfect correspondence frustrates the work. We tie up the liberality of God. We squander, corrupt, dilute His grace, even when we use it, and we delay as if we wished to let it stand and evaporate and lose its peculiar celestial freshness before we take heart to use it. Thus, if we may reverently say it, God with His grace in men's souls is like a man whose thoughts are eloquent and beautiful, but who has not the gift of speech, and cannot utter them, or only in a stammering way which both hides and spoils them. He has not free scope with us. He can but produce a very inferior work at best because His materials are wilfully incapable of a better. Grace was never so gloriously unbound as it was in Mary's soul, except in the Human Soul of Jesus, which is out of all comparison. In her heart it expatiated as if it were in heaven, and developed itself in all its unhindered magnificence. She corresponded to every grace to the uttermost. Her graces were gigantic, immeasurable, even when compared with the graces of the apostles; and yet she corresponded perfectly to their vastness. Thus every moment of life was bringing down fresh inundations of grace, which were foliage, flower, and fruit almost the moment they had touched the virgin soil of her immaculate heart. Days went on, adding themselves to days, and years to years; and like some fabulous machinery, with overwhelming force and with invisible speed, the process of correspondence and sanctification went on, multiplying itself in one short hour beyond

the figures of all human sums. Her life moved too amid tall mysteries, each of which was a universe of sanctification in itself. The march of her soul was among immaculate Conceptions, adorable Incarnations, Hidden Lives of God, Passions of the Impassible, Defeats of the Omnipotent, Birth and Growth and Death of the Immutable and Eternal, the Government of a God, mysterious prodigies of Dolor, Descents of the Holy Ghost, Queenships of Apostles, and the like. What oceans of grace might not such a life of supernatural heroism absorb, and convert into a holiness which, soberly speaking, is unimaginable by angel or by saint! No wonder we always speak so unworthily of Mary. It is one of those sad human infirmities from which we never can escape; for all language is so inexpressibly unworthy of her, that the most glowing praise and the coldest commonplace sink down into one level from such a distance as the inaccessible mountains of her holiness. Love alone can feel its way far on toward her; and happy is he whose love for her is ever growing. He is enjoying in time one of the choicest blisses of eternity.

—*The Foot of the Cross*

Saint Joseph and the Eternal Father

To Saint Joseph the Sacred Infancy was his Cross. Bethlehem was to him instead of Calvary. The earthly troubles and inconveniences which the Incarnation brought along with it fell in great measure upon him as his peculiar burden. It came too when he was comparatively old. The end for which he lived he did not arrive at until he was mature in years. The treasures of God were committed to his sole keeping. Doubts and fears, anxiety and haste, public notice and difficult responsibility are trials which press heavily on those whose first manhood is passed, and more heavily than common on a tender and affectionate heart like that of Joseph. We cannot avoid picturing him to ourselves as one who was rather fitted for contemplation than for action, both on account of his exceeding tenderness and also of his

remarkable quietness of spirit; yet, out of the bashful timidity of a contemplative he had to draw the bravery of an apostle. For well-nigh thirteen years the Incarnation hardly allowed him one day of peace; and then when something of an anxious peace came to him at Nazareth, the fires of divine love from the vicinity of Jesus silently fretted his life away. We feel that his whole early life was but a preparation for the unworldly office he was at last to assume. Most saints have one eminent cross, which towers above their other crosses and gives the character as well to their sanctity as to their lives. Who can doubt but that Bethlehem was Joseph's cross? Yet it was also a land of pleasantness, a very world of joy, even to him. He would hardly have exchanged Bethlehem for heaven, just as we know Simeon had prayed for his rest and release to wait until he had seen the Lord's Christ on earth. It was dear to him, not only because it was a cross and he a saint, and the saints are ever enamored of their crosses, but because it was a marvelous abounding joy. The mysteries which checkered the twelve years were fountains to him of holy gladness and of divine love. The sight of Jesus was an endless vision, not only soothing to the soul, but filling it to overflowing with spiritual sweetness. The light in His eyes, the tone of His voice, the play of His fingers, His attitudes in His various occupations, were all an overwhelming delight to Joseph's soul. His spiritual discernment, and his union with God, enabled him to penetrate deeply into all things.

If the unborn Baptist leaped for joy when he heard the sound of Mary's voice, what must the company of the sinless Mother have been to Joseph to whom, next to Jesus she most belonged! His conjugal love was actually part of his religion. His tender ministries to her were a worship which sanctified him and raised him near to God. Mary is the copious fountain of joy to the whole earth; and it was Joseph who dwelt nearest to the fountain where it sprang all fresh and abundant from the rock. What a joy must she have been to him! His office toward the Incarnate Word was one which he could hardly ever exercise without

trembling. But surely it was as the thrones are said to tremble in heaven—with an excess of reverence which is also an excess of bliss. If exhaltation humbles the saints, and if humility is of all graces the grace most prolific of interior joy, how great must have been the humility of Joseph, how transcending the rapture of his joy. Love wore him out and so he died. But we may well believe that it was through the concussions of joy within his soul that love came to slay him. At Nazareth his outward cares were fewer. His attention was more exclusively concentrated on Jesus. Jesus also, as He grew up, and took His share in the toils of the poor household, in some sense passed more from the jurisdiction of Mary to that of Joseph. Thus, Joseph's commanding of Jesus, teaching Him, coming in contact with Him, were more frequent and more direct; and if, as we believe, each order that he gave Him shook his own soul to its center with thrills of trembling rapture, we can understand how the aged saint, in the beautiful furnace of those last burning years, would become the helpless prey of love. Moreover, the shadow of the Eternal Father, as it settled down upon him, could not do otherwise than bring with it a joy too full of profound reverence to be agitation, but one which would have laid too great a weight of bliss upon a soul that was not expressly chosen to bear such an incomparable burden. He was drawn within the ring of those unutterable shadows which the Holy Trinity is pleased to cast around itself; and if Abraham's bosom was sweet rest full of visionary beatitude, where the old patriarchs awaited the opening of heaven by the risen Jesus, what must the bosom of that awful divine cloud have been, in which the soul of Joseph was involved! Even to our hearts, devotion to the Holy Trinity is one of simple exultation, because it is also one of purest adoration. What must have been the jubilee of Joseph's spirit? That it was the shadow of the First Person which was on him, unspeakably intensified his joy. To him was communicated the likeness of the incommunicable Father, of whom even the apostles said, "Show us the Father, and it is enough for us." He was like a sort of visible mission of

the Unsent Father, to whose Person mission does not belong; only his peculiar presence goes along with the mission of the Other Two. Thus also, by his similitude to the Father did he enjoy a mysterious similitude to the Son, and by his office to Mary he wore also the likeness of the Holy Ghost, the uncreated jubilee of the Godhead. Who is sufficient to analyze the heavenly joy which was blended in the waters of fountains such as these? Who can name its kind, or test its virtues, or put into figures its proportions and its quantities? Yet this shadow of the Eternal Father was cast on Joseph by the Sacred Infancy. Was it not then to him a land of pleasantness, and in its own way also of peace, even though it fell to his lot as a heritage of suffering?

—Bethlehem

The Seventh Dolor

We learn from this last sorrow that there is no darkness like the darkness of a world without Jesus, such as Mary's world was on that fearful night. It is darker than the darkness of Calvary; for that is a darkness that cheers, refreshes, and inspires. Jesus is there. He is the very heart of that darkness. He is felt more plainly than if He was seen. He is heard more distinctly because all is so dark about Him, and other sounds are hushed by the gloom. It is like being in the cloud with God, as tried souls often are. It is truly a darkness, and brings with it the pain of darkness; yet there is hardly a loving soul on earth to whom such darkness would not be more welcome far than light. But the darkness of the absence of Jesus is, as it were, a participation in the most grievous pain of hell. If it is by our own fault, then it is the greatest of sorrows. If it is a trial from God, then it is the greatest of sufferings. In either case, we must not let the light of the world tempt us out of the darkness. In such a gloom it is indeed dreadful to abide; but the consequences of leaving it by our own self-will are more dreadful still. It is not safe to think of creatures. We must think of God only. It is the sanctuary of

"God Alone," the motto of the saints and of the saintly. We must deal only with the supernatural, and leave Him who brought us there, whether for chastisement or fervor, to take us out when it shall be His will. Meanwhile, we should unite ourselves to the dispositions in which Mary endured her seventh dolor, and this will bring us into closer union with God.

One more lesson still she teaches. She did her work in the world, as it were, with all her heart; and yet her heart was not there, but in the tomb with Jesus. This is the grand work which sorrow does for all of us. It entombs us in the will of God. It buries our love, together with our sorrow, in the Blessed Sacrament. Sorrow is, as it were, the missionary of the Divine Will. It is the prince of the apostles. The Church is built upon it. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Our Lord is with it always to the end. It is sorrow that digs the grave of self, and blesses it, and burns incense in it, and buries self therein, and fills it up, and makes the flowers grow upon the tomb. The great secret of holiness is never to have our hearts in our own breasts, but living and beating in the Heart of Jesus; and this can rarely be accomplished except through the operation of sanctified sorrow. Happy, therefore, is he who has a sorrow at all hours to sanctify!

—*The Foot of the Cross*

The Empire of the Precious Blood

There are saints in heaven. They are the heights of the Church of Christ. There are newly-converted sinners upon earth. These are the lowest depths in the happy land of redeeming grace. But the light upon those mountain-tops is the glory of the Precious Blood, and the sunshine in those valleys is the kindness of the self-same Blood. There are sufferers in purgatory, dwelling in the mysterious region of pain and quietude, of patience and of love. They live beneath the earth, yet are upon their road to heaven. Their land is vast and populous. It is a territory won

from hell by the Precious Blood, and its pain made uneternal. It is a detention, not an exile—a detention which is a marvelous artifice of mercy, one of the many compassionate devices of the Precious Blood.

There are sufferings on earth, sufferings by which hearts are cleansed, sins swiftly expiated, merits rapidly accumulated: sufferings in which grace comes, sufferings which are secret loves of God. These earthly sufferings also the Precious Blood alleviates, illuminates, sanctifies, crowns, glorifies, and knows how to render so delectable that they who have drunk deep of the Precious Blood get a strange new nature and thirst for more suffering still. Thus, both these extremities of suffering, beneath the earth and on it, belong to the empire of the Precious Blood. If we look outside ourselves, we see everywhere the empire of the Precious Blood stretching away in interminable vista. The whole Church is its legitimate inheritance. Her jurisdiction is the law and order of the Precious Blood. The priesthood is its army of officials. The Catholic hierarchy is its venerable administration. The lofty tiara, that most sovereign thing on earth, gleams with it like the polar star of nations. The Blessed Sacrament, multiplied a hundred thousand times, is its own adorable self, its Heart-fountain, and its Five Free Wells, worshipful in its union with the Godhead, the beautiful amazing Created Life of the Uncreated Word. If we look within ourselves, there is still the self-same empire of the Precious Blood. There is the character of Baptism, its still inexhausted grace, its titles unforfeited or re-conferred, its infused habits, its heroic Spirit-gifts. There are the footprints of so many Absolutions, the abiding fragrance of such reiterated Communions, perhaps the character of Order and its fearful powers, perhaps the mysterious traces of Extreme Unction, certainly the signet of the Holy Ghost in Confirmation, and the nameless graces, less vestiges where Divine Feet have gone, and where Divine Virtue still resides. There also is that innermost sanctuary of the soul, which so few reach on this side of the grave, the secret cabinet where the Holy Trinity dwells

blessedly, the very center of our nature, up from whose secret recesses joys shall one day break and flow, such as we never dreamed of, such as would look to us now far beyond the possibilities of our nature. All this, outside us, or within us, is the empire of the Precious Blood.

—*The Precious Blood*

The Church

As it is with the countries of the world, so it is with the ages of the world. Each age has its distinctive spirit. It has its own proper virtues, and its own proper vices. It has its own sciences, inventions, literature, policy, and development. Each age thinks itself peculiar, which it is; and imagines it is better than other ages, which it is not. It is probably neither better nor worse. In substantial matters the ages are pretty much on a level with each other. But each has its own way and requires to be dealt with in that way. This is the reason why the Church seems to act differently in different ages. There is a sense in which the Church goes along with the world. It is the same sense in which the shepherd leaves the sheep which have not strayed, and goes off in search of the one that has strayed. Each age is a stray sheep from God; and the Church has to seek and fetch it back to Him, so far as it is allowed to do so. We must not make light of the differences of the ages. Each age needs persuading in a manner of its own. It finds its own difficulties in religion. It has its own peculiar temptations and follies. God's work is never done in any one age. It has to be begun again in every age. Old controversies become useless because they have ceased to be convincing. Old methods are found unsuitable, because things have changed. It is on this account that theology puts on new aspects, that religious orders first succeed and then fail, that devotion has fashions and vicissitudes, that art and ritual undergo changes, that discipline is modified, and that the Church puts herself in different relations to the governments of the world. But the Precious Blood adapts itself with changeful uniformity

to every age. It is alway old, and always new. It is the one salvation. It is coextensive with any civilization. No science innovates upon it. The world never exhausts its abundance or outgrows its necessity. . . .

—*The Precious Blood*

The alterations of the bed of the ocean, the deposits of mighty rivers, the crumbling of the rocks, the devastations of the earthquake and volcano, the elevation and subsidence of the earth, the spreading of sandy deserts, the mutations of climate from other and less normal catastrophes,—all these things have altered the face of the earth, made it more habitable, and by deciding its physical geography have gone far to decide its history and to locate the centers of its civilization. So it is with the spiritual earth and the vicissitudes of the Church. The Church is the work of the Precious Blood. It was made by it, cleansed by it, adorned by it, propagated by it, and kept glorious by it. The Church is that portion of creation purchased by the Precious Blood out of alien possession, recovered from unjust holding, redeemed from slavery, conquered from enemies. The salvation of individual souls is dependent upon the Church. Hence the Building up of the Church is one of the grandest works of the Precious Blood. The conversion of nations, the history of doctrine, the holding of councils, the spread of the episcopate, the influence of the ecclesiastical upon the civil law, the freedom of the Holy See, the papal monarchy of past ages, the concordats of the present day, the filial subordination of Catholic governments—all these things alter the face of the spiritual world. Every one of them is a vast fountain of God's glory, an immense harvest of souls, a prolific source of human happiness, and the antidote to a thousand evils. Above all things, the honor, the freedom, and the empire of the Holy See are the works of the Precious Blood. The Church is the Body of Christ; and nowhere are the lineaments of our dearest Lord, His beauty, His persuasiveness, His strange commingling of gladness and of woe, so faithfully expressed as

in the Head of His Church. Hence it is that the joyousness of the saints ebbs and flows with the vicissitudes of the Holy See. Hence it is that the most secret mystics are affected by the fortunes of distant Rome, like the wells that dry and fill again in hidden sympathy with an earthquake in some remote quarter of the world.

In quiet times good men can love the Vicar of Christ and look at him as their venerable father and monarch, ruling over all the best affections of their hearts with a loyalty which the hereditary sovereigns of the earth can never obtain, and which is a far more heavenly thing than a patriot's love of the land which gave him birth. But when the clouds gather round the Sacred City, when the pressure of self-seeking potentates again begins to crucify our Lord in the person of His Vicar, when the coils of diplomacy twist themselves round Peter's throne, when well-nigh all the world, schism, heresy, unbelief, ambition, injustice, and Catholic states world-tainted, league together against the Lord's Anointed, then to the saints the face of Christ's Vicar becomes like the countenance of his Lord. It grows more majestic in abjection. The anguish on it is divine. It is more worshipful than ever at the very moment when it is calling out our tenderest love and our keenest sympathies. This too is a time rife in victories to the Precious Blood. Rome is saved, and man has not saved it. They were bearing the papacy to burial, and lo! a glorious resurrection! When the deliverance was furtherest off, then it came.

But these great historical triumphs are not the only victories of the Precious Blood in evil days. It wins many in the secrets of hearts. The spirit of the age is forever tainting the minds and hearts of the elect. There are few who do not end by going with the multitude, few who are not imposed upon by the pompous elation of science, by the juvenile pronouncements of an improved literature, by the complacent self-glorifications of temporal prosperity, and by the pretentions to an unparalleled grandeur which each generation makes as it struts out upon the stage of life. It is fine to innovate; it is refreshing to be audacious; it is a cheap

victory to attack; it is comfortable to be on the same side with the loud-voiced world around us. Few men have clearly ascertained their own principles. They admit into their inconsequent minds wandering ideas of the times without seeing that they are in reality hostile to the holy things which occupy the sanctuary of their hearts. Hence they get upon the wrong side, especially in middle life. It is not youth so much as middle life that falls in this way. While the generosity of youth makes early life to err in questions of degree, the same generosity keeps it incorrupt in questions of kind. It is the egotistical self-importance of middle life that makes apostates, reformers, and malcontents. It is then that men get upon the wrong side. They fight under wrong banners. They frustrate the promise of their better years. They become out of harmony with the Church. From that hour their lives are failures. They grow querulous, and contentious, peevish and captious, bitter and sour. Their old age is extremely solitary; and it is a great grace of God if they do not die on the wrong side, they who seem to have been raised up to be the very foremost champions of the right. Now, it is bad times which open men's eyes. They see then how the spirit of the age has been nigh to deceiving them, how they mistook its loudness for wisdom, and how near they were to losing the simplicity of their devotion in the unhelpfulness of an intellectual demonstration, which has passed away and has done as little, and is remembered as much, as the popular novel of a season. Many are the victories of disenchantment which the Precious Blood gains in times like those. Souls, that are won back to the old ways and the antique fashions, may yet be saints, whose promises of holiness must soon have been withered, cankered, or dispersed in the vanity of modern attempts and innovations.

—*The Precious Blood*

What astronomy, and geology, and chemistry, and other cognate sciences and what politics, statistics, metaphysics, and their congenial sciences are to many men, and to most men, the Church

is to us. It is our devotion, our pursuit, our passion. It is our favorite science, our chosen study, our life's enthusiasm. As a matter of taste, no one can blame us; for tastes are facts, and facts which are mostly inculpable, and hardly admit of criticism. One man has as much right to be immensely interested in a Sacrament as another in a curious dip of strata, or the varying magnitude of a perplexing star, or in some new property of a metalloid, or in the dethroning of an old element by dividing it. If one man may, without blame, make all other sciences, literatures, and pursuits, subordinate to his one science, literature, and pursuit, another may make all sciences, literatures and pursuits subordinate to his exclusive devotion to the Church. This is putting devotion to the Church upon its lowest ground. It is well sometimes to remember lowest grounds for things. Important rights are often founded in them. Not unfrequently the essences of things lie hidden in them. They ought not, therefore, to be abandoned or despised. To me, then, the Church is what the starry skies are to an astronomer. I know there are other things in creation besides the Church but I am only very partially interested in them. Practically, to me, the world means the Church. For the only interest I can take in the world outside the Church arises from the fact that the Church must be affected by its movements. I delight in all progresses of science because they are an addition to the science of theology. I sympathize ardently with all social progresses, because they are at once, whether as difficulties or facilities, questions of soul-saving. The revelations of statistics form a sort of handbook for Catholic charity. Psychology illustrates the Sacraments. Political changes interest me; for they all act upon the wonderful fortunes of the Holy See, and are mostly for its advancement. All real widening of men's minds by education, or literature, or art, is an effacing of prejudices against the Church and facilitates conversion. In almost every department of knowledge, the world, as it advances, keeps answering its own objections to religion; and this is both gratifying and interesting. All that is wide, deep, forward, and active, and trustful is most con-

genial with the spirit of the Church. Even the grand old science of history has taken to discovery; and its discoveries, one after another, are so many reparations to the Church. . . .

But in reality, devotion to the Church may rest upon higher grounds than these. In my own mind it rests upon this—and I say it with all reverence—that it is God's own devotion. It is God's creation within His own creation, a creation called into being with a specialty of love, created with the miraculous toil and human Bloodshedding of the Omnipotent. It is His own life, His own created life, in creation. Its history is His biography upon earth. Its form is the abiding of His Incarnation among men. It is thus forever repeating His Three-and-Thirty Years. It is not that He does not love the whole world, and the most out-lying souls in the world, with a strange surpassing love. On the contrary, it is for the very sake of the world that He loves the Church with a better love. If His almighty wisdom saw fit to overwhelm our liberty with its constraints, its first act would be to turn the whole world into the Church, making the Church and the world one and the same thing. The world is His creation as Creation; and our wretchedness did not find its prodigality of love sufficient. The Church is His creation as Redeemer; and it lies in the furnace of divine love heated seven times hotter than the furnaces of creation. Thus, the Church is His devotion, His complacency. He loves it with a special, an electing love. This is the true ground of our devotion to the Church. It is God's own devotion. It is the choicest way of loving us. It is our choicest way of loving Him.

—*The Precious Blood*

Saint Joseph and the Catholic Priesthood

Saint Joseph is spoken of as the keeper of the Virgins, Jesus and Mary. But look at the parallel between Saint Joseph and the Catholic priesthood. Was he the steward of God's house? So are they. Was he the dispenser of God's gifts as the Church calls

him? So are they. Was he the keeper of the Bread of Life? So are they. Did he handle, carry, lift up, and lay down the Body of Jesus? So do they. If Jesus was subject to him, so is He, and even more wonderfully, to them. If he kissed Jesus, they may not be so bold, but they kiss the paten where He lay yesterday, and is to lie today. If he washed and clothed Jesus, they in this must stand a little further off, and wash the sacred vessels and napkins, and clothe His pyx, and veil His tabernacle, and adorn His flower-girt throne. What are exposition, procession, benediction, communion, locking and unlocking the tabernacle, carrying the Blessed Sacrament to the sick, but so much imitation of what Joseph did to the Child Jesus? Only that, what was his solitary prerogative now belongs to multitudes of priests, and that the mystery of consecration is a kingdom of wonders beyond our sight into which the shadow of Joseph cannot reach, but where Mary and the Holy Ghost and the great primeval work of Creation alone come with their similitudes.

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

The Seven Channels of the Precious Blood

If we go round the world, there can hardly ever be an hour in which some children are not being baptized. Baptism is the application of the Precious Blood to their souls. No act in life can surpass it in importance. It effects a most complete spiritual revolution even in the unconscious child. It effects it in a most wonderful way, and by means of mysterious infusions, and in consequence of a mysterious Incarnation, and through the virtue of mysterious Bloodsheddings; and these things take their effect through the pouring of water simultaneously with the pronouncing of the grand Names of the Divine Persons, accompanied by an intention on the part of the person baptizing, priest or lay, man or woman, or even child. . . . Each Baptism is a greater, a diviner, a more magnificent work than the creation of the material world. Yet, in sober truth, the waters of Baptism

are flowing perennially, so that if they could run together, they would form a flowing rivulet, undried throughout the year. . . . If we put all the continuity of Baptism into numbers, and remember meanwhile the spiritual magnificence of Baptism, we shall be able to form some idea of the prodigality of the Precious Blood hidden in those waters of salvation.

And what is Absolution? It is the authentic dripping of the Precious Blood upon the head of the repentant sinner. It is God's patience grown so patient as to be magnificent. It is, almost but not quite, the limit of the outstretching of the eternal arms of mercy. In it, human acts reach to one of their highest heights. They are lifted up to merit salvation by the merits of the Precious Blood. Human sorrow is consecrated and made divine by the touch and the anointing of the sorrow of Jesus; and that unction was only to reach us with the flowing of His Blood from His gracious wounds. Without shedding of Blood there was to be no remission. Millions of souls are in heaven this day who, without Absolution, would have been in hell. Yet it were better a whole solar system should be shattered to pieces than a single soul lost. If there is something very divine in the facility of Baptism, reminding us of creation when the word was spoken and forthwith the work was done, there is also something very divine in the difficulty and effort of Absolution, reminding us of redemption which was only accomplished by a Passion and with Blood. Hearts have to be softened, habits weakened, dispositions changed, occasions deserted, new tastes infused, entanglements untied. The Precious Blood has to put forth more of its strength here than in Baptism; because it has to overcome more inveteracy and resistance. It has also to venture its sacred riches more prodigally here than in other Sacraments. In all Sacraments it runs two generous risks, the risk of invalidity and the risk of sacrilege. Both these risks are more especially run in the Sacrament of Penance. Yet, what numberless confessions are daily heard! What hundreds or thousands of Absolutions are daily given, the greater portion of which I am undoubtingly certain,

from the character of God and the experience of the confessional, is valid! How many Absolutions have we ourselves received in our lives and hope still to receive! Surely, if we could see as God sees, and as perchance the angels are allowed to see, we should behold innumerable streams of Blood intersecting the crowded souls of men, as a vast river-system shows like a network on a map; and this would be a vision of the prodigality of Absolution.

How beautiful are the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage! Full of human tenderness, yet so softly insinuating the sovereign love of God; teeming with habitual self-sacrifice, yet filling the sacrifice with such sweetness that it becomes not painless only, but a joy; breeding in young hearts such a gravity of new heavenly duties, and yet flinging over life the luster of additional light; hardening the changeful heart with a supernatural preparation of perseverance, and yet softening every harshness and making every sensitiveness more exquisitely keen; fortifying the soul with boldness to do right at the very moment it is gracing it with all the bashful timidities of love; elevating affection into devotedness, and giving therewith a beautifulness of purity which is akin to the white innocence of virginity:—these are the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage; and they are all creations of the Precious Blood. They are all of them working daily in millions of hearts, hearts in sorrow and hearts in joy; and their life is in the throbbing of the Precious Blood. This time it is not a stream of Blood we see, but a wide-stretching inundation.

Of all the sacraments, Ordination is the most like marriage. It weds hearts to Jesus. It makes those hearts His homes. The priesthood is His domestic life in the Church. It is replete with images of Mary and Joseph. It repeats Nazareth. But what a complication of graces is implied in Ordination, and then also what a magnificence of powers! Moreover, it is a manifold Sacrament. Its unity is a threefold unity in Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, a shadow of unutterable divine grandeurs. Furthermore, it is, as it were, the sacred vessel in which the other six Sacraments are kept and out of which they radiate their glory and their life. This

grand Sacrament is the earthly heart of the Precious Blood. It is to it on earth what the Sacred Heart is to it in heaven. It gives the movement to its life. It regulates its energy, and makes its beatings equable as well as forcible. It concentrates the Precious Blood in itself and then vehemently diffuses it all over the earth, through every remotest vent of missionary fervor. The graces of this sacrament are like the graces of angels; and yet they are of all graces the most human; for they impart the likeness of the Sacred Humanity as no other graces impart it. Each grace of Ordination is a characteristic of Jesus. Its gift is to make the clear heart of the priest a mirror into which the Saviour is forever looking down and His Countenance is marvelously glassed therein. Yet, for all this, men must be partially changed into angels by the operation of these intensely human graces. In truth, Ordination is especially a Sacrament of the Precious Blood. Jesus became a priest by the shedding of His Blood, by the offering of His Bloody Sacrifice. His Blood is the virtue of His priesthood. Yet, when it lay separate from the Soul and from the Body, it was angels who kept it, and not men. This is the figure of the strange mixture of the human and the angelic in the graces of the priesthood. But how many are the anointed of the Lord, how multiplied are their works, how manifold their vocations, how vast their missions, how continuous their recruits. All this implies so much the prodigality of the Precious Blood.

Jesus once looked into a young man's face and loved him. He has perpetuated this incident in His Church. It is perpetuated in the sacrament of Confirmation. When Jesus went, and the Holy Ghost came to take His place and to administer the Church, He also was forever looking into the faces of the young; and His look was a gift, a magnificent substantial love, an imparting of that fortitude which youth so much requires, and the want of which made the young man of the Gospel turn away in the cowardice of an earthly sorrow. But the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost were only purchased for us by the Precious Blood. The very title, which the Gospel gives to the times before the sacri-

ficial shedding of our Redeemer's Blood, was "the times when the Holy Ghost was not yet given." Now look at the multitude of Christian youth. If there is much to sadden, how much also is there to cheer! How much generous piety do we behold, how many early breakings with the world, how many works of mercy, how many edifying confraternities, how many levites in the seminaries, how many beautiful vocations in the cloisters! What is all this but Confirmation's gift of fortitude, made fertile by the Precious Blood!

We have seen that the Precious Blood shed itself chiefly round about the death of Jesus; and that His death was in reality a death by bleeding. Hence the hour of death is the chosen hour of the Precious Blood. It is the favorite season of its ingenuities. Thus it makes a sacrament for itself at that precise time, the sacrament of Extreme Unction, the last of the anointings, the anointing reserved for the supreme contest of the soul, the last of the sacramental visitations to the elect. This wonderful sacrament shrouds its graces in mystery, a mystery congenial to the darkness which belongs to its dread hour. But the very fact of its being a sacrament at all, and the season of its administration, sufficiently testify to the grandeur of the graces which it must convey. God is eminently a God of time and place and His times and places are the measures of His gifts. Extreme Unction, like the oil of the Grecian wrestlers, anoints us for our mortal struggle. Whatever relics of sin there may be in us, the powers of darkness will fasten upon them. But the grace of this sacrament searches them out with a mysterious penetration, and puts them to a supernatural death. The best name for its grace is the grace of health; and so, if God does not will that it should impart health to our bodies, it turns its exotic medicinal virtues upon the soul. Other Sacraments liken our lives to the life of Jesus. This likens our death to the death of Jesus. It diffuses itself over our souls, strewn with the works of a whole life, and gathers up the fragments which other sacraments have left untouched. It cleanses them with a last cleansing. It arranges them with neat-

ness and order for the coming of our Lord. It puts them in their right posture and attitude for being most safely judged. Must not its graces be very peculiar, and yet also very magnificent? Throughout the world there is a whole population dying daily. A section of the world is always on its deathbed and in its agony. How prodigal then must the Precious Blood be of its magnificent peculiarities in this pathetic sacrament?

But what shall we say of that twofold wonder, the Sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrament of Communion? There the Precious Blood puts on the vesture of omnipresence. Multiplied by how many hundreds of thousands of times is it not dwelling, whole, living, and glorified, in the glory of the dread reality of Communion? Into how many thousand chalices does it not empty itself from out the Sacred Heart in heaven every day? . . . It is bewildering to think of the countless graces of expiation which flow daily from the Sacrifice or the countless graces of union which flow daily from the Sacrament. . . . The tinklings of the Mass-bell change the whole aspect of the unconscious world. Unknown and unsuspected temporal calamities are daily driven away, like clouds before the wind, by the oblations of the Precious Blood. Nay, through the crust of the earth the superincumbent weight of that Blood presses its way and reaches the sinless caves of Purgatory. Consolations of all shapes and patterns come there, and are the cooling rains of the Precious Blood. . . .

In closest propinquity with the sacraments we should make mention of the Holy See, wherein dwells the paternity of all the Sacraments, and in which resides with incredible plenitude the jurisdiction of the Precious Blood, the regalia of the kingdom of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus. At no point of history can we look at the Sovereign Pontiff without seeing, as it were before us, in most vivid type, the Fourth Bloodshedding, the Crowning of Thorns. The pontifical monarchs of the Middle Ages, no less than the martyr-pontiffs who haunted the Catacombs, or the modern Popes who toil like patient heroes through the pusillanimous hos-

tilities of diplomacy, equally bear upon them this peculiar image of our Lord. They administer His Headship. They are His Head made visible to us. The tiara is the most veritable crown of thorns, and the pontificate the most literal of martyrdoms. It is the Head ever bleeding, bleeding slowly. There is the old suffering patience in its majesty. It is a true royalty; but men mock it because its kingly mantle is soiled with all earth's poverty. It is a hidden kingliness, like the kingship of the guard-room at Jerusalem. It is a sort of sacrament of the Sacraments, the sacrament of the royalty of the Precious Blood. The Papacy is the Fourth Bloodshedding continued till the Doom. . . .

—*The Precious Blood*

Our Guardian Angel

Loneliness is one of the dangers we have to fear, because of the inability of our mortal nature to cope with the adverse forces of the invisible world; and to meet this danger, the provident love of God has given us our Guardian Angel. Ever at our side there is a golden life being lived. A princely spirit is there who sees God and enjoys the bewildering splendors of His Face, even there where he is, nearer than the limits of our outstretched arms. An unseen warfare is raging round our steps, but that beautiful bright spirit lets not so much as the sound of it vex our ears. He fights for us, and asks no thanks, but hides his silent victories, and continues to gaze on God. His tenderness for us is above all words. His office will last beyond the grave, until at length it merges into a still sweeter tie of something like heavenly equality when, on the morning of the resurrection, we pledge each other, in those first moments to an endless blessed love. Till then we shall never know from how many dangers he has delivered us, nor how much of our salvation is actually due to him. Meanwhile, he merits nothing by the solicitudes of his office. He is beyond the power of meriting, for he has attained the sight of God. His work is a work of love, because his sweet presence at

our side he knows to be a part of God's eternal and creative love toward our particular soul.

—*Creator and Creature*

The Sacred Infancy and the Holy Eucharist

What our Blessed Lord allowed to happen to Himself in the days of His childhood, He allows to happen to Himself daily in His sacramental life. The Creator of the world lay as a weak Babe in the manger, and the irrational creatures, the patient ox, the despised ass, stood where the kings of the earth did not deserve to be. They gazed fearlessly with their meek unintelligent eyes on the veiled majesty of the Eternal. They warmed His cold limbs with their neighborhood and their breath. Just so He lies upon the altar, and the lights twinkle around Him, and the flowers shed their fragrance and wither away before Him, and the curls of sweet smoke from the aromatic gums rise up daringly to His throne, and entwine themselves amid the rays of His monstrance, and dim the crystal of His home, and leave their odor upon His veil. All that is little, simple, innocent is gathered for Him out of His own creation and put to attend Him as it was at His Nativity.

In Bethlehem He slept; and Mary and Joseph saw the closed eyes and heard the regular breathing, and watched all the graceful circumstances of childhood's sleep. Nothing could be more complete than His seeming inobservance. For a while it looked as if the cold and misery of the cave were buried for Him in a happy oblivion, the outer world cut off from Him, the current of bitter thought sundered in twain, and the awful omnipresence, so to call it, of His prescience suspended in an infant's light but refreshing slumber. But no! Beneath that breast, the heart is awake, though the body sleeps. Beneath those restful eyelids the terrific vision of Calvary is strong and clear, and fierce as in the hours of vigilance. Sleep has touched not the operations of His commanding reason, where ineffable acts of sacrifice, religion,

merit, and dignity are being multiplied with every one of the precipitate pulsations of the new-born Babe. Just so in the tabernacle. There He sleeps in the embrace of a mystical death. He debars Himself from the use of His senses. He sees not with His eyes, He hears not with his ears, He stretches not forth His hands, nor do His lips part to speak, neither does the incense strike upon His sense of smell. But He is there under the species, governing the world, dispensing grace, and living a multiform life which it baffles our words to tell and our love to worship worthily.

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

Our Lady's Feasts

Who is not full of joy when a feast of our Lady comes, those bright days that strew the year with stars? It is as if the Church called us to leave the noise and distractions of the world, and walk by the shores of some calm majestic lake, in whose unruffled and translucent depths are imaged the mountains of Divine Perfection. We remember the various splendors of the angelic kingdom; and we remember how that in the one first moment of her Immaculate Conception the Imperial Mother of God was adorned with greater graces and shone with greater merits than all the angels put together, were they to add their merits into one for a million years. If we do the sum of her grace and merits by the arithmetic of Suarez, for which that saintly theologian was thanked by Mary herself, how far beyond the expression of our figures has the sum advanced when fifteen years of moments, each moment with the full use of reason, each moment, even of slumber, meriting on a gigantic scale, are fully accomplished! To our eyes she is almost lost in the light of grace. We can hardly make a picture of what she was like as a Jewish woman of royal birth. You may measure her grace by the marvel of her divine tranquility under the visitation now about to come. The jubilant ocean of Uncreated Love rose like a cloud and hung with His deluge of graces and gifts over the kneeling maiden. His angel

went before Him, and He overshadowed the soul and body of Mary, while He waited for her sweet word. In that shadow, no created eye could see her. Her word was hardly spoken, fleeting away on the silence of the swift night, but the Eternal Word was incarnate in her ever-blessed womb. What is Mary now, compared with what she was before? Like an inland sea girt round with the mountains of God; or rather herself compassing the Incomprehensible and Illimitable, fifteen years older than the Eternal, and the Eternal's Mother. Why do you weep, Christian soul? It is because there is no prayer and no thanksgiving but tears, when we think of the Incarnation. Each mystery of Jesus and Mary is so touching, that no tale of earthly joy or woe is half so pathetic; but the tenderest and most overwhelming of all is the unspeakable mystery of the Incarnation itself. The Annunciation is the hardest feast in the year to keep as it should be kept.

Now for our arithmetic again. We have the sum of three-and-thirty years to do, and such years! We have Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, the sea of Tiberias, the mountain and plain, Jerusalem, Bethany, Olivet, and Calvary to add together and to cast up. When Jesus ascended into heaven, Mary had become our Mother as well as His; and what can be said of her accumulated graces and merits, except that it was a miracle that she still remained the same Mary, and a lowly dweller upon earth, so unutterable had been the torrent-like influxes of all the communicable excellences of God which had poured into her soul and mind and flesh for well-nigh half a century of human years. There was nothing like her among creatures. She herself was like nothing but the Most Holy Trinity, who is virginal and yet prolific. She has need now to say to our admiring love what Jesus said to His disciples after the Resurrection: Handle Me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and blood, as ye see Me to have! Yes! there are the beatings of her Immaculate Heart, the accents of a voice reminding us of the tones of Jesus, the tones of the voice that will pronounce our endless doom. There is the mingled look of joy and sadness, of triumph and patient expectation in her human eye. She can feel

pain; she has to die; she will be judged. You see she is still one of ourselves.

The day of Pentecost is come. O Eternal Spirit! What canst Thou give her which Thou hast not given her heretofore? She is full to overflowing with the plenitude of grace. But the mighty Wind that will not be stayed rushes round her, shaking the strong temple to its huge foundations; and tongues of fire fall like a shower of snow-flakes into the very depths of her capacious soul. It is a moment only to be compared to the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation. Yet, where is the theologian who will express for us in sober and intelligible words what happened to Mary in that third sanctification? Let it pass. She remained Mary still. That is all we know. She was queen of the apostles and nurse of the infant church. Do the sum of fifteen more years and add to the manifold virtues of each moment an intensity of patience, of patient absence from her Son, which outdid, each instant, all the accumulated endurance of the Arabian Job. Is not the death-bed often a revelation in the soul, and of all men, most particularly so to the saints? What was it to Mary when she died of divine love, dissolved at last like sweetest frankincense in the fire which had burned around her and within her unconsumingly these three-and-sixty years? From all the quarters of the globe the apostles were gathered round their dying queen, and gazed astonished at this last marvel of her grace. Who can doubt that the graces and merits of her deathbed only were far beyond the collective excellencies both of angels and of men? And when she stood before her Judge who was her Son as well, when the commandments and the counsels were applied as tests and measures to her soul, when she had not one sin whereof to be accused, and yet threw herself more utterly on redeeming mercy than ever judged creature did before or since, what a resplendent universe of grace she was in her own single self! Yet what was it all but one single splendor shed around her from her Son? When the mountain uprises in the clear sunshine, beautiful, well-edged, and fair, it steals nothing from the sun, and its leagues of radiant

land and rock and wood and water are no drain upon the solar fountains of beautifying light. So was it with Mary and her Son. O Blessed Sacrament! and Thou art so near, Thou fountain of immortal grace! Thou art there who did all this to Mary! And I have held Thee in my hand, O Body of Jesus, O soul of the Incarnate Word, O Son of Mary, O God made man! I held Thee whom Mary compassed while Thou didst enclose the nothingness of us both within thy bewildering incomprehensibility!

—*The Blessed Sacrament*

All Men Have a Special Vocation

There are multitudes of people, who, by the help of the sacraments, keep their heads above water, clear themselves of mortal sin, and save their souls, through the amazing compassion of God. In reality, the frequentation of the sacraments, along with what that frequentation implies, is a spiritual life, for it is a life of grace, not of nature. It could not end in salvation were it otherwise. But we generally use the term "spiritual life" in a more restricted sense. We mean by it an aiming at devotion, at the evangelical counsels, or at the perfect interior keeping of the commandments. Of persons so aiming we think that a small number of them have what we call vocations. These vocations are of three sorts. They are either to the ecclesiastical state, or to the religious life, or to some very special life of inward contemplation or of outward philanthropy in the world; and these last we account to be very rare. The remaining vast multitudes of spiritual persons have no vocations. They simply remain in the world sanctifying themselves in their proper place and by their proper work. Certainly this division expresses a truth, but it expresses it very badly—so badly as to lead us to a false view. The truth is—and it follows from the specialty of God's love of us—every man has a distinct vocation, a vocation of his own, a vocation which may be like other men's vocations, but is never precisely the same. For convenience' sake, we may class

people in the spiritual life according to their devotions, or outward position, or peculiar work. But these divisions do not include everything. No two of us are alike. God saw a specialty in us eternally. It was this specialty which He loved. It is this specialty which decides our place and our work in His creation.

Thus, then, we have each of us, a vocation of our own. No man or woman on earth has the same. There has never been precisely the same vocation since the world began. It will never be precisely repeated up to the day of doom. No matter what our position in life may be, no matter how ordinary our duties may seem, no matter how commonplace the aspect of our circumstances, we each of us, have this grand secret vocation. We are, in a certain inaccurate and loving sense, necessary to God. He wants us to carry out His plans and nobody else will quite do instead of us. Here is our dignity; here also is our duty. This is the deep fountain of our love; this also is the deep fountain of our fear. Our vocation is as real a vocation, as distinctive a vocation, as the vocation to be a Carmelite, or an Ursuline, a Franciscan, or an Oratorian. It is less visible, it is less easy to describe. We may be less certain about it, and it is far harder to know. But there it is, a regular and complete vocation. If this be true, all spiritual life is simply working at random, if it is not based either upon the knowledge of this vocation or upon the endeavor to find it out. That vocation, whatever it is, is God's will about us. He may never intend us to know it fully. But He intends that we should try to find it out. Holiness consists simply of two things, two endeavors—the endeavor to know God's will, and the endeavor to do it when we know it.

The sense of our vocation, the feeling that we have a vocation, peculiar, special, individual, unmated in the whole world, the faith that this vocation is one of pure love, that it flows straight out of our eternal predestination, that it is at the mercy of our own free wills, that all the endless grace which comes to us comes because of that vocation, and that it lies around us either as a revealed or unrevealed revelation, an interpreted or unin-

terpreted vision—this is truly an important matter. We know neither God, nor ourselves, nor others until we have this knowledge. It puts others into their true position toward God, and ourselves into our true position toward them. It makes us first to feel that we are God's property, and to act as His property and not our own. It also makes God our property. He is not only our God, but our own God. He is really ours in a way in which He is no one else's through special love of us separately. He is not distant, He is not common property between all His creatures, though He is most truly so. His arms are not round all men, and round us among them, though verily His arms are so around us. We have Him all to ourselves in secret caresses, in private embraces, in a privileged exclusiveness. He is the God of our souls —simply, truly, sweetly, our own private God. I am always pleased with Saint Jane Frances de Chantal for being so sharp with a pedantic lady who said that, for fear of selfishness, and attachment, and a want of holy property, she would only call God God, not her God, her own God. The Blessed Mother would not hear of it. She had been brought up in a different school. We must be of her school. We know of no such wire-drawn distinctions. We are greedy of God and will have Him all to ourselves, leaving His infinite wisdom and power to manage how to be exclusively everybody else's God, while we have the exclusive enjoyment of Him for ourselves.

Nowhere do we find God so infallibly as in the special vocation which He gives us. But this outward providence does not altogether settle what this vocation is. It settles much, but does not settle all. We have an inward life to live as well as an outward one, and the inward completes the outward, fulfills the outward. The inward life more often interprets the outward than the outward the inward. It is certainly an overwhelming truth, and yet a cheering one that we have all got a special vocation from God. . . .

But there is another truth lying close to it, which is almost as astonishing. It is this. We are continually receiving special

revelations from God. We live in the midst of revelations. We are almost always inspired, not merely now and then, but almost always and in a very true and peculiar sense. In other words, we are continually receiving special revelations from God. We live in the midst of revelations. We are almost always inspired—not merely now and then, but almost always and in a very true and peculiar sense. In other words, we are continually receiving what we ordinarily call inspirations. There is hardly ever a complete silence in our souls. God is whispering to us well-nigh incessantly. Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul or sink low, then we hear these whisperings of God. This is so invariable that we come to believe that He is always whispering to us, only that we do not hear because of the hurry, noise, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on. Thus, He is forever telling us His Will, not only by His Church and in His Word, but privately. These inspirations are like private revelations to us. There are, as you may suppose, many intricate and difficult questions connected with these inspirations. I only want to put them before you at present as a part of the specialty of God's love toward each of us separately. Moreover, these inspirations are immediately connected with our special vocation, whatever it may be. They are given either to show us what our special vocation is, or to enable us to do our special work, even if we do not know that it is our special work. They are to our vocation what the sun and rain are to the seed or the growing plant. They further God's special design upon us and enable it to develop itself. Holiness of the highest kind is distinguished by the quickness and fineness of its ear in detecting these inspirations, and by its promptness and docility in following them.

If we have rightly estimated the importance of our special vocation, we shall set a due value on these inspirations. But as the vocation is itself a source of holy and salutary fear, so likewise, are the inspirations. God ever speaking, the world ever making us deaf—this is something like the description of our state. The very delicacy of the operations of grace makes us fear, be-

cause it makes our correspondence to them a matter of such nicety. God and the soul form a world by themselves; and unless we live an inward life in this secret world, these operations of grace will escape unperceived. We cannot doubt that, even with our utmost diligence, we are continually missing divine opportunities in our souls. We must train our ears to catch our inspirations, or they will sound only like an inarticulate murmur, even when they are not inaudible altogether. Without an inward life, we have no chance of discerning them. Not unfrequently, they require other ears than our own to hear them; very frequently, other minds than our own to understand them. This is part of the necessity of spiritual direction. We have to take someone else into the councils of our inward life to protect God against ourselves, to guarantee Him, as far as may be, against the wrong which self-love is always ready to do to Him.

Many of these private inspirations solicit us, plead with us, hang about us, repeat their invitations for weeks, months, or even years. Others come and ask, wait awhile, and go away again, and return after a long interval. Others come and hardly wait for an answer, but pass on like a flash of lightning. Some of those which go, come back, some do not; of those which come back, some return soon, some late, some once more, some repeatedly. Some explain themselves, some simply present themselves to be welcomed, and if not admitted, depart to return no more. You see they are numberless, and very various. Yet each of them is a glorious gift, each a divine operation, each an incomprehensible compassion, each a private revelation, each a distinct reinforcement of that special design for which God, in His creative love, fashioned us in His own mind from all eternity, when He might have made what seems even to our self-love a better choice. It makes us nervous to think of the multitude of these inspirations, their apparent waywardness, their divine susceptibility, and their extreme rapidity. We are almost tempted to despair in the midst of our own inward world of divine things, amidst all this bewildering apparel of sanctifying love. Yet, even in the case of the

most momentary of our inspirations, our sanctity, possibly in some indirect way our very salvation, may be mixed up with our docility to them. It is to them at any rate that we are to look both for a disclosure of our special vocation, and for light and fortitude to work it out successfully and in the way of God's Will. It will be part of our amazement, when we are judged, to see what a life of inspirations we have had, and what immense holiness we might have gained with comparative facility.

We must never, then, disjoin our inspirations from our vocation. It is the two together that contain the specialty of God's love for us. But I must speak now of our knowledge of our own secret vocation. I most fully admit that it is a very great advantage to us that we should know it. In fact, the knowledge of it is one of our most influential graces. Nevertheless, comparatively few men do know it. Of the multitudes who do not know it, some half know it, some suspect it, some are half right and half wrong in their idea of it, and some have not the remotest notion of it; and there are most excellent persons in every one of these classes. Then, again, of those who do not know it, some remain unknowing through their own fault, and some because God keeps them in ignorance. In the case of these last, we must suppose that they are kept in ignorance for their own good, and that their ignorance is itself an operation of grace and an act of divine love. There may be reasons peculiar to themselves for ignorance being better for them than knowledge. Their vocation may be of such a nature that there might be certain spiritual dangers in their knowing it, or their knowledge of it might go far toward frustrating its fulfillment, or it may involve so much suffering that nature would shrink from it if it foresaw it. It must be enough for them to be sure that their being kept in ignorance is a work of divine love. At any rate, we must all guard against two temptations in the matter. The first is a temptation to discouragement because we cannot find out what our special vocation is, or what special attraction of the Holy Ghost is implied in our inspirations. We must remember that our very ignorance may be part of our voca-

tion, and that our inspirations may purposely avoid illuminating that portion of God's will about us. Many men of eminent sanctity have to live in their own souls as in the profound magnificence of a cavern, in which they see partly by the strange reflections of those stalactites which get light we know not whence and almost seem to create it, and partly by their eyes becoming habituated to the gloom and learning supernaturally to see in darkness. All discouragement is based on the thought that God loves us less than we thought He did. We may be confident that this ignorance, if it is from Him, is no proof of the littleness of His love, but rather of its grandeur, and certainly, of its specialty, which, after all, is the sweetest thing in love.

The second temptation is to think that God is laying snares for us. There is often a great appearance of this in the spiritual life. An impatient and distrustful heart fancies it detects God circumventing the free will which He does not allow Himself absolutely to overrule. The very vastness of our grace makes it present the appearance of an entanglement. Not unfrequently also we separate ourselves insensibly from God, and glide into a current of self-will, which silently and swiftly bears us far away. Then God mercifully disposes outward events with fitting inward graces, and with gentle mastery brings our lives back to the point at which we left Him. This is in reality, a most beautiful ingenuity of compassion and often an answer to our frightened prayers. But it has a look of interfering with our free will; and in those unloving moods when we take everything in a wrong way we may come to suspect the goodness of God. His love suffers in its credit because it has been affectionate enough to resort to artifice, not for its own sake, but for ours. Moreover, God always remains essentially unknown. He who commits himself to God does not know to how much he commits himself, nor to what. When we follow our inspirations we always come to give Him more than we promised. Still, our promise was a promise, and not a bargain. The grace of generosity consists in its ignorance of the entire sacrifices it has made inevitable to itself by

its loving trust in God. When our heart is hot with love, the sight of these deceivings of divine love fills us with rapture. But in cold times, the same sight makes us suspect God and resolve to be cautious with Him. Yet we should be greatly surprised if He were to put before us the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of protestations we have made to Him in past years that He was to do what He liked with us and that we freely gave Him all we were, all we had, and all we were capable of suffering, that we desired to have no will but His, and that we only wanted one thing—which was to love Him more, and we did not care what it cost us. You see He has done no more than take us at our word; and we must not care too much about the petulance of our cold seasons. They were certainly great prayers to make, but we were sincere when we made them, and, if it had to come over again, we should commit ourselves once more in just the same way. Nay, sometimes it seems as if we were unfairly entrapped by an equivocation in spiritual matters. We have promised in one sense and God has chosen to understand it in another. Oh, these are grand times! They ought to put us into great spirits for they are divine familiarities, and unusual graces are latent all around. Presently, if only we do not stand on our rights, we shall be raised we know not whither, but somehow far nearer Him than we are now. Furthermore, we may be sure that a time of divine ignorance has fewer snares than a time of divine light. Where God is concernd, we may walk with more unhesitating confidence in the dark than in the light. There is no snare in God.

Hence it is that I have so often repeated myself to you about the necessity of having a filial feeling toward God. I often see that you know what is coming when I begin on that subject. You smile because it is already so familiar to you; for a sermon, like a song, may have a burden and refrain; and half a dozen burdens may do duty for a hundred songs. But, really, anything like an interior life is out of the question without this filial feeling toward God. You must believe, you must trust. You must walk rather by your own faith about Him than by His manifestations

of Himself. We creatures are in no condition to judge of Him by appearance. But our faith comprehends Him. He is our Father. That is His grand relation to us. Any acts of His which seem to contradict that can only be transcendental proofs of it. The problem of the world burns in some men's hearts like an uneasy fire. But, if their whole heart were on fire with the love of God, where would the problem burn them? There would be no room for it inside. God is my Father and He could not persuade me to the contrary Himself. This is the position which faith takes up. It is the only position on which a spiritual life can be built. All our graces have to do with our special vocation. Our ignorance of our vocation, if it be from God, is one of the appropriate graces of our vocation. A really interior spirit will see cause for special thankfulness to God for the graces it has not received, as much as for those it has received. Indiscriminate grace would have been its ruin. The soul would have been impeded by it in accomplishing its special end. It would have been either a sickliness, like a forced growth, or a deformity like a hindered growth. It is a great grace that our one special grace should not be interfered with. Spiritual mixtures are confusions. Who are the blind men in the spiritual life, but the overladen with good works, the oppressed with pious practices, the overworked with devotions, the overdriven with activities? Still, I am willing to grant that the knowledge of their special vocation, which some men have, is an enviable grace. But—and please observe this—no man will ever be an interior man until he has reconciled himself to the idea of inequalities in grace.

Besides which, this divine ignorance is never total. There is always a glimmering which the soul acknowledges as its leader. How little there was to lead the Kings of the Epiphany! and yet, what would they have lost if they had decided not to follow the star! We may take this star as an illustration to us of the doctrine of vocations and inspirations. Many a star has risen to us in the clear blue night of faith and we have not followed it. Many a leading light has stood over where the Young Child was, as it

were, beckoning to us with a brightness in which, modest as it was, we felt there was something heavenly, and yet we turned away, and have now clean forgotten it. If we could but have hearts to feel, and eyes in our souls to see, where we really are! There are good angels around us and graces are raining down upon us, great and small, all our lives long, and inspirations are falling upon us, thick as snow-flakes and almost as softly and as silently, and we are fastened with a thousand fastenings to great unknown eternal purposes, and we feel them no more than a strong man feels the cobwebs and the gossamer on the autumnal grass; and all the while we are closed all around, and walled in, not so much with the sun, and moon and stars, with the air and the floor of our own planet, as with the living presence of the All-holy who will not spare us one moment from His sight, and who, even while we sleep, expects us to do our work of glorifying Him, and whose love of us, and therefore His jealousy of us, is as everlasting as Himself.

But there may be some whose ignorance of their vocation is their own fault, or, if not in any fault at all as yet, who may come to the knowledge of it by using the proper means. A man who does not lead a life of prayer of course does not lead a life of light; and he who does not dwell in inward light can neither see God nor understand His ways with us. If then, we would learn what our special vocation is, or at least make that endeavor to learn it, which God expects of us, we must begin by being interior, by attaining that habit of seeing in the dark, to which I have already alluded. God must be watched in order to be known; and we must watch Him on our knees, and in the lowest place within ourselves to which we can sink. Thus we shall learn much if we do not learn all. We shall learn enough to give us the opportunity of being much holier, even if we do not learn the precise thing of which we are in quest—namely, our special vocation. Then again, as spiritual direction is almost a necessary condition of self-knowledge, so is it in ordinary cases almost an inevitable condition of the knowledge of God's dealings with our

souls. As heavenly apparitions are visible to some of the bystanders, and not to others, so God's movements in the soul are often manifest to the eyes of others and hidden from our own. Sometimes there are natural reasons for our not understanding the operations of grace within ourselves, and sometimes there are supernatural reasons for their being invisible to us, or inexplicable. While we must be accurate and punctual in the examination of our conscience, we must also lean on someone else, and be content, sometimes, and within certain limits, to see with His eyes and hear with His ears. If we do not lead interior lives, our whole course may be changed without our knowing it. Sometimes this happens through some little inobservation of our own, which hardly amounts to a fault and yet is pregnant with consequences. Sometimes new circumstances gather round us, and an invisible hand presses the helm and our life steers upon a track almost indistinguishably like its old one, yet leading to a very different quarter. Hence to our own inward vigilance and to our docility to intelligent and disinterested direction we must add a quiet observation of what happens to us from without, and which is God's eternal providence over us. A pondering—a grateful, pensive, admiring pondering—of past mercies is a very different thing from that sickly self-inspection which unnerves so many pious persons and is unwholesome to all. Our past years are a scroll of prophecy full of rules and intimations for the future. Like the prophet, we must eat the scroll and eat it often. A spiritual life arranged independently of our outward circumstances, and alongside of our external duties instead of upon them, is simply a stronghold of delusions.

But the surest method of arriving at the knowledge of God's eternal purposes about us is to be found in the right use of the present moment. We must esteem our present grace and rest in it, and with tranquil assiduity correspond to it. Our present grace is the most infallible will of God. It is a revelation from God, which almost always brings its own authoritative interpretation along with it. What we want for our sanctification is not merely

grace, but the right grace at the right time in the right place. God's will does not come to us in the whole but in fragments, and generally small fragments. It is our business to piece it together, and to *live* it into one orderly vocation. Like a lantern in the night, grace gives light around our feet, a circle of light, just enough to prevent our stumbling. But then we must look at our feet. If we strain our eyes into the gloom ahead of us, we shall stumble in spite of the lantern: nay, we shall stumble because of it, its shadows move so suddenly and with such unwieldy strides. Our present grace is also the one least beset with delusions, and we can act safely upon it, although perhaps not comfortably, even when we do not see how it matches with what has just gone before, or how it can fit into any conceivable future which our circumstances will allow. The hours are like slaves which follow each other bringing fuel to the furnace. Each hour comes with some little faggot of God's will fastened upon its back. If we thus esteem our present grace, we shall begin to understand God's purposes. It seems an easy thing to do; and yet it cannot really be easy, because so few do it. One man is always pulling the past to pieces, while another man is marching with his head erect into the uncertain future, disdainful of the present. Strange to say, intentions are more exciting than actions, and therefore more attractive. For safety and for swiftness, for clear light and successful labor, there is nothing like the present. Practically speaking, the moment that is flying holds more eternity than all our past, and the future holds none at all, and only becomes capable of holding any as it is manufactured piecemeal into the present. The spiritual direction of multitudes of men consists of nothing but keeping them to this; and it is one of those unlikely works which has the misfortune of being seldom successful, even though it is indispensable, and on the whole least successful where most indispensable.

But we may follow all these rules with adequate fidelity and yet not find our special vocation. True, but we have found out that it is God's will we are not to find it out; and surely there is no

repose like that of a certain will of God. When we have ascertained that, we are contented. The endeavor to learn our vocation is the way to learn it, though it does not secure the knowledge of it. But it secures our sanctification, and therefore its results are practically the same as if we did know our vocation. The endeavor sanctifies us more than the attainment of our end, and it does so because it deals only with present grace, and so with ascertained wills of God. So long as our ignorance is not our own fault, love is all around us and we are on the right road. To some, as I have said, God gives a clear view of their special vocation. He gives it to them as a grace apparently independent of their endeavors, and before they have made any. On some it dawns gradually like a slow sunrise, and makes many a beautiful revelation of God in the changeful splendors of its rising. On some, it flashes all at once without any reason that we can see, and without our having expected it. Sometimes, on the other hand, it comes like one of those expected things which have the charm of always having come unexpectedly. To some the vision is granted when they are yet far off from the fulfillment of it. To others it unveils itself only when they are upon it, so that they almost fall over it. Now, it is plain that the knowledge of our vocation will affect our whole spiritual life. Men who enjoy the vision of it lead special lives based upon that knowledge. It is a great grace, but only to those who have it. It would not be a great grace to those to whom God does not give it.

But the majority never know what their vocation is because God does not intend them to know it. It is part of their vocation that they should not know it. They even fulfill their vocation and do not know that they have done so. They have no feeling of it at the very moment they are fulfilling it. This ignorance is as great a grace as the knowledge would have been, though it is a less consoling one. If it be less in itself it is better for us, because it is fitter for us. The size of our graces is not of as much consequence as their suitableness. They must fit us, and they must fit each other, and they must fit the end which God has in

view for us. Thus we may be tranquil and courageous in our ignorance. But, even if we belong to the third class of men, those who, through their own fault do not know their special vocation, there is nothing to hinder our courage or our tranquility, if only we are endeavoring to learn God's will about us. We must not fret. Fretting neutralizes grace. It looks like a little evil, but it is in truth a great one.

If there be retrospect in eternity, and the Vision in front of us does not absorb us wholly, I conjecture that our life will present this picture to us. In the far back of an unbeginning eternity we shall see a clear and special purpose for which God created us, an individual specialty which He has never quite repeated in any other of His creatures, a special attraction which called out His love to us, or rather, which His love invented, and which made us more dear in His sight than possible better men would have been. This specialty decided our vocation on earth. It fixed our place. It determined our time. It fashioned our work. All the mercies of our lives had their faces set toward it. Outward circumstances made a current which drew us that way. All our graces were in order to it. All our inspirations, like according notes in music, were a unity and each sounded out of that eternal purpose and seemed to call us on to its fulfillment. Each present moment was a partial development of the one grand special end; and now our glory in heaven answers to the old eternal specialty of God's love about us. The one eternity looks the other eternity in the face. Thus we have had all along the arms of God's special and indeed singular and unshared love round about us, and in the light of our Blessed Home, we see with rapture that all has been predestination, and that all has been free will.

—*Spiritual Conferences*

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